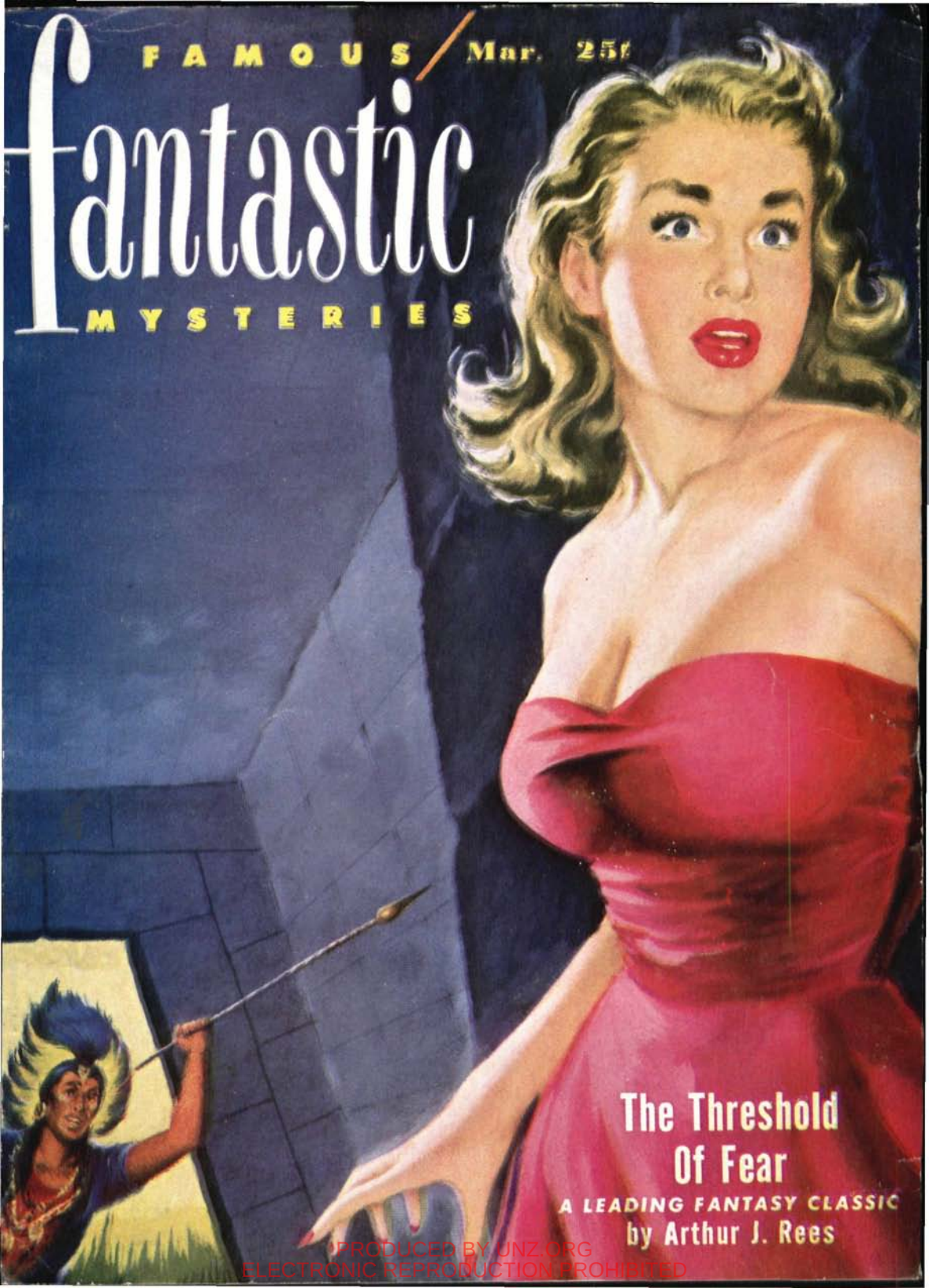

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FAMOUS
fantastic
MYSTERIES

MARCH, 1951

VOL. 12 NO. 3

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Autosuggestion? Hypnosis—or the work of an ancient god? Unbelieving, skeptical, Edward Chesworth ventured into the spiritual ruins of the Inca culture—and found them as real as the material remnants of its temples—found his mind, his very sanity challenged by an outraged yesterday . . . and finally found himself dead, yet dreadfully alive!

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Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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Published bi-monthly by All-Fiction Field, Inc., a subsidiary of Popular Publications, Inc., at 1125 E. Valle Ave., Kokomo, Indiana. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Kokomo, Indiana. Copyright, 1950, by All-Fiction Field, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Single copy, 25c. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, $1.50; other countries 38c additional. All correspondence relating to this publication should be addressed to 1125 E. Valle Ave., Kokomo, Indiana or 205 E. 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in U. S. A.

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Autosuggestion? Hypnosis—or the work of an ancient god? Unbelieving, skeptical, Edward Chesworth ventured into the spiritual ruins of the Inca culture—and found them as real as the material remnants of its temples—found his mind, his very sanity challenged by an outraged yesterday . . . and finally found himself dead, yet dreadfully alive!

Does a great civilization ever die? The question is as pregnant with meaning today as that of man's own immortality—and is one reason your editors find a unique timeliness in bringing you this masterful novel by one of fantasy's immortals. Tripping over our own present atomic "threshold," shall we, too, plunge headlong into a future of our betters—our ignorance stronger than their knowledge, haunting our heirs forever?

The Threshold of Fear

By Arthur J. Rees

I was at the end of my tether.

It has been said that the world owes each of us a living. This may be so, but it goes with such an indifferent sense of obligation that the only way to extract the debt is to take the world by the throat and shake the living out of it. Such, at least, is my experience; and by some weakness of training or temperament that method of collecting the due is beyond me. Had I known how, I would have certainly tried it; but, lacking the highwayman's courage (or skill), I had been reduced to beggary, while the world went on its comfortable way with buttoned-up pockets. So this bright September morning found me, Richard Haldham, nearing my thirtieth year, seated in the grill-room of a Strand hotel, eating the last lunch for which I could hope to pay, and wondering where I was to obtain the next.

"London puts every man in his place, and it's the one city in the world where a woman may starve."

These words came to my mind as I sat there, in the midst of the thronged tables under green palms. I had heard them from a Londoner during the war—one who had returned from the Far East at fifty to fight for the flag. I had smiled inwardly at his cynicism then, thinking it too severe to be true; but now I was not so sure. At any rate, London had put me in my place, and that was an embittering thought.

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In a sense the war was to blame, as it has been to blame for so many things. But I bore it no grudge on that account, nor did I hold my country responsible for not finding me another career in place of the one which the war had marred. To fight for a country like England is a privilege at any time, and not a task to be undertaken in the hope of reward. England is grateful to her sons, and that is enough. All I asked was the right to remain in my native land with some chance of a decent living assured. That was a problem with which I had grappled, with poor results, since the Armistice. A little reading for the Bar, followed by four years' fighting in France, is not an ideal foundation for a career or the best preliminary towards compelling the world to disgorge what it is supposed to owe you. When the war broke out I was articled to the law, but I had applied myself to the study of that profession with the easy conscience of an only son, who expects in the course of time to succeed to a quite considerable estate.

The war put an end to that expectation. The heavy taxation of the period reduced my father's rent-roll by half, and dubious advice led him to speculate on the Stock Exchange in the hope of bettering his affairs. In that hope he was mistaken, like so many more. Unsupported by special knowledge, how could he succeed where thousands failed? His speculations were fantastical, and worse than that. When he died suddenly, with the coming of the peace in sight, the family home of Harethorns, in Berkshire, was no longer ours.

I survived for a while where better men fell, but bit by bit the passing years pushed me downhill. For a time I made some poor sort of living in various ways. Legal copying, odd jobs as a clerk, and selling articles on commission (euphemistically called "travelling," this) helped out my days. These and other occupations I followed in turn, with equally barren results. Journalism I tried several times, but Fleet Street had no use for my freelance pen; perhaps because I lacked a title, or had no scandalous reminiscences to impart.

So there I sat amid the palms and glitter of the charming grill-room on this bright autumn day. I had paid my bill and tipped the waiter, and a shilling remained. My last shilling!

That lunch was a foolish extravagance or an heroic act. It depends entirely upon how you regard such things.

I had thrown prudence to the winds, gone to the Pageham for lunch, where I had as good a meal as my ten-shillings would allow. The grilled sole was excellent, and the claret (a half bottle) one of which the head waiter—an old friend of mine—had recommended in years gone by. "You can pay more, m'sieu," he had murmured, with his incomparable shrug; "oh, vair much more, but the wine might not be so good. An Englishman orders wine by a price. A Frenchman? *Mais non!* he knows better by far. This wine is the equal of the Château Margaux. See, I tell to you a trick of ze trade. But it shall be a secret between us, *hein?*" And he went off with the pretence of a finger to his lips.

My lunch put me in better conceit with myself. Who does not feel better for a well-cooked meal and a good glass of wine? It was a cheap lunch for the Pageham too.

I SIPPED my last glass of wine and looked about me. All the tables among the palms seemed full, but people kept arriving still. On the distant music platform the little dark conductor jerked his limbs dementedly in the crescendo finale of the coming of the Volga's boats. Around me was chatter and laughter, hurrying waiters, and faces glowing with plethoric content. The man opposite me discharged a bill of three pounds for food and wine, and lolled back somnifacient, like a gorged beast of prey.

There was a lull in the music for a while. Then the orchestra started upon some arrangement for strings, which by and by turned into *Chanson Triste*—that sad little Russian air. With visions of silent steppes and dim grey horizons in

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my mind, I turned to listen. As I did so, my eye was attracted by a girl's face.

She was seated in one of the small curtained alcoves of the restaurant which looked down upon the street, and there was something in her attitude which drew my attention at once. Through the half-drawn curtains I could just catch a glimpse of her, sitting quite still, one listless hand on the table before her, the other raised to her face. In the distance I observed the curve of her chin above slender white fingers, the contour of her pale cheek, and the dark hair beneath her hat. Her head was turned away from me, as if she were gazing out of the window into the street below.

I sat and looked at her. The last notes of *Chanson Triste* died away, and was followed by the sound of popping corks. The room was overcrowded now, but the girl sat in her alcove as remote from the glare and noise as though in another world. The lines of her graceful figure seemed listless with unhappiness, almost despair. That was my first thought as I watched her, and wondered what she was doing there alone. She fascinated me, in a way. It was certainly not the place where one expected to encounter a figure of grief.

It has been said that by mere force of contemplation it is possible to attract the attention of a person unconscious of you. I know nothing of that; and, indeed, such was not my intent. But just then the object of my scrutiny moved her head. She looked around, and across the crowded room our eyes met.

It was of the briefest duration, that interchanged look. Quickly she turned her head away again. The next moment she rose composedly, left the alcove, and made her way quickly towards the swinging glass doors. I remained in my seat, haunted by the memory of her fugitive glance. Direct though it had been, I do not think that she saw me at all. Perhaps across her vision had floated some hidden phantom of the brain when her eyes seemed to look into mine. For there was fear in their clear, dark depths, and it was very real. She called to mind a picture I had once seen in a Florentine church, of a woman staring at the figure of Death. She had opened the door of her house to knock, and it was Death himself, come for her. This girl had the look of the woman in the picture. In it was the same quality of helpless, appealing fear, as if she too had been brought face to face with some horror too great for the human soul to withstand.

Thinking thus, some impulse led me to spring to my feet and follow her retreating form. Perhaps it was the feeling that she needed help, which you may think I was little qualified to give. But the perplexity of deciding the point was spared me, for before I could reach the doors in my turn she had gone. I walked down the steps, but she had vanished from sight.

My glance ranged futilely up and down the crowded Strand. Useless to seek for her there; and if I had found her, what could I have said or done? These considerations restored my common sense. I tried to put the episode from me, and wondered how I should spend the afternoon.

Unlimited time was at my disposal, and I still had a shilling to spend. It was a mild, clear day of young autumn; grey and sharp, but for London wonderfully clear. At least I could take a ride on a bus, and enjoy the keen fresh air. One, passing half empty, stopped outside the hotel. I jumped on it, and clambered upstairs. At the bottom of the Strand it turned into the Kingsway.

It cost me fivepence to go to Newington Green, and another fivepence to return. I have always liked bus-riding through London streets, and I came back by another route; Islington and the Angel to the City. Islington was a new part of London to me, and I wondered how its denizens endured life there. Did any higher form of angel than the hotel of that name seek to comfort the pallid women and children who swarmed in its streets?

The bus went down the City Road, and made for Blackfriars by way of Queen Victoria Street. At Blackfriars my ticket expired, and I got off the vehicle at

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St. Paul's Station, opposite the venerable red-brick building of *The Times.*

I had two coppers from my ten shillings left. In similar straits Herman Melville, sailor and mystic, flung his last penny into the sea. There is no sea in London, but lights and shadows floated over Blackfriars Bridge, and I could have dropped my last coins from the river parapet there. And I once read a story in which someone spent his last twopence on a ticket for the Tube.

I DID neither of these things. Walking slowly across the road beneath the railway bridge, I stopped a passing newspaper boy and spent a penny on an evening paper which I didn't want. What were starting prices or the winner of the first race at Newmarket to me? Tucking the paper unread beneath my arm, I strolled leisurely along the pavement to the offices of *The Times.* Standing there, I casually scanned the advertisement sheets from the day's issue of the paper, displayed on a board for the benefit of unemployed in quest of work.

Many times had I done this before, but without result. Perhaps I was not sufficiently an early bird, for when I set out after vacancies thus displayed, I always arrived too late. That, of course, was the fault of myself, and not of *The Times.* Therefore it seemed folly on my part to look at the advertisement sheets at that hour of the afternoon. Nevertheless I went through them, with a conscientious eye. Nothing. I was turning away again when my eye was caught by an advertisement at the bottom of a column which I had overlooked. It ran:

> CHAUFFEUR-MECHANIC: Wanted Immediately, for the country, young, single, and untraveled Englishman. Apply personally, after noon, Trusibond, 26a Gray's Inn Buildings, Gray's Inn Court.

It was not the singular wording of this advertisement which made me read and read it again. One might have thought that a traveled driver was always to be preferred to an untraveled one, but I had long since learned to look with a tolerant eye on the whims of employers and their different ways. The consideration which weighed with me and kept me standing there was whether it was worth my while to make an application for the job.

I had had my own car before the war, and two years as an officer of the Tanks Corps in France had given me a fairly decent knowledge of the mechanics of cars and motor-engines and similar things. But was it the slightest use? Previous applications for such jobs on my part had always been turned down because of my lack of a chauffeur's credentials, and it was now getting on for four o'clock.

The thought of my penniless condition decided me. There was no reason why I should not call and ask if the post had been filled. Of my ten shillings a penny remained, and how could I expend it more providentially than in a fare to look for work? That reflection was final. I went along New Bridge Street to Ludgate Circus, and caught the first bus for Gray's Inn Road.

I went past that thoroughfare and into High Holborn looking for the familiar entrance to the Inn. And when I saw it, I dropped off the bus.

Was ever modern fortune sought by more mediaeval way than the narrow old passage which runs beside the wine-vault from High Holborn to Gray's Inn? I knew the passage well. In my legal days I had used it often enough, and had sometimes gone at the luncheon hour to the ancient vault at the corner, where law clerks and other small legal fry gathered for sherry and sandwiches among great wine casks and the odour of wine in a dim, dark room. In a changeful age the law still remains faithful to its taste for wine.

The place seemed the same as I passed it: the serious, wine-sipping figures within; the great fire burning for the temperature of the wine in the cellars below. As for that, I suppose it has looked the same any time for two hundred or more years past.

By the side of it, I went down the

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narrow paved alley into the quiet recesses of Gray's Inn, with its dusty passages and old houses huddled together, like old, grey, staring faces in rows. Among them I went looking for Mr. Trusibond's address. Gray's Inn Buildings were halfway down a green court on my right; the number—26a—was the last set of offices in the block.

Scanning the board at the entrance, I discovered that Mr. Trusibond had his office in the second floor. Nothing so modern as a lift was visible, but the crooked passage showed me a staircase at the end. I went up it to the second floor, along another passage in which the wind whispered, unless the whisper came from the ghosts of dead-and-gone lawyers conferring there. On a door the words *Trusibond, Solicitor,* were inscribed, so I knocked.

In reply a sliding panel in the door was thrust up, and a girl with short-cut hair looked out at me with the complete and superior assurance of the London business girl. With manicured finger-nails suspended in mid-air above her typewriter, she curtly asked me my business there.

As she spoke I had a brief glimpse of an oldish man in horn spectacles perusing some legal document at a table placed against the further side of the room.

The next moment the door was opened, and the man with glasses beckoned me in. With a gesture, he invited me to follow him across the outer office. At the far end he knocked at an inner door, opened it, and again silently beckoned me in. Within the room we entered a tall, thin figure of a man sat at a table writing. My guide turned away and left me with him, closing the door behind him as he went.

"I have come—" I began, but the man at the table interrupted me at once.

"About the advertisement. Yes; I know."

■ HOW HE knew this was beyond me, for the clerk with the spectacles had made no mention of the advertisement when he took me in, and, indeed, had uttered no word at all. Trusibond's was a reticent specimen of even the legal face. It was quite expressionless, with high cheekbones and fallen cheeks; yellow as a sheet of parchment, and almost as long. It reminded me (to use another metaphor) of a yellow coffin, and, like that receptacle, it did not give much away. The deep-set eyes which regarded me from beneath heavy brows had almost as little animation as if they were already cold and stiff. After a lengthy pause he spoke again.

"Have you brought your references and credentials?"

My heart sank at this request, then beat hopefully at the thought that the vacancy was as yet unfilled. Looking at my interrogator anxiously, I called up an ingratiating smile.

"I have no references as a chauffeur," I replied, "but I can drive any make of car, and look after it too."

Mr. Trusibond heard me dispassionately, as if the answer held no interest for him. He asked my name and former occupations and I told him.

"Where were you employed last?" he asked, playing with his pen.

I told him rather despondently that I had never been a chauffeur before.

He raised eyebrows at that. "What then?" he queried.

"I have followed many occupations of late years," I replied: "a clerk, last of all." Then I was struck with a happy thought. "But I was educated for law."

I told him I had been through the war, and returned to England in the peace to find all hope of a legal career blotted out, because of circumstances which I briefly explained.

"This would be a poor job for a young man like you," he said. "It is no business of my own, and I know very little about it. I've been requested to find someone for a client of mine, who lives in Cornwall, not a great way from Penzance. The duties are to look after a car, and to drive my client's nephew, who is an invalid, about the countryside."

"I shall be very glad to go, if you think I would suit your client," was my reply.

He gave me a hard look.

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"Perhaps you might, if I'm willing to take the risk of appointing you without references," he said shortly. "That is, if you have no objections to carrying out your duties at night." He glanced keenly at me again.

I was surprised at the condition, and showed it.

"At night?" I exclaimed. "Why—"

"Why are you wanted to drive a car at night?" he retorted. "Well, that is very easily explained. The young man you are going to drive is suffering from some sort of nervous disorder, the result of an illness abroad, I believe. You are sufficiently competent to drive a car in the nighttime, I presume?"

"Of course I can, if necessary, but it's rather an unusual thing to be employed to do."

"That's a matter which concerns neither you nor myself," he rejoined dryly. "You have heard the reason, and it is not for you to make comment. In fact, such a remark savours of indiscretion to me. You'll allow me to point out that a young man in such a post as you are seeking is expected, above all things, to be discreet. My client writes that he dismissed his last chauffeur for gossiping at the village inn." He feigned to shuffle among the papers of the table, as if in search of his client's letter, but his eye was watching me all the time. "Perhaps," he continued, "it will be wiser not to send you down. There have been many other applicants, although I have not yet come to a choice."

Again I met his look smiling, though I did not feel very cheerful just then.

"I shall try to show discretion, if you'll give me the chance," I said. "I'd be very grateful to you for the job."

He seemed to consider the subject in another lengthy pause.

"There's an undoubted risk about it, taking you without a reference," he said at length, in his dry, unsmiling way. "I really don't know what to say. Perhaps—but here's another thing I must put before you, and it's the most important matter of all. Have you traveled? Have you ever been abroad?"

"Abroad is a vague word," I answered. "During the war I was over in France."

"So I understood from your war service," he dryly replied. "That does not matter. But were you ever farther afield?"

"In Germany too," I answered wonderingly, "though only as far as—"

He interrupted me with an impatient wave of his hand.

"That's of no consequence either. I have something quite different in my mind. Have you, for instance, ever been in Peru?"

He joined the tips of his fingers together on the table in front of him as he asked this question, and looked at me over the apex with a pretentiously careless air. Had he desired to know if I'd been to the moon it would not have surprised me more. But I kept an impassive face, and answered "No."

"Nor to South America, let us say?"

I gave a similar answer to that question also, and added that I had never been anywhere out of England except in France and Germany, during the progress of the war.

He appeared satisfied with these answers, thoughtfully rubbing his yellow jaws with cautious fingers, and looking at me again with his dry, considering eye.

"I think you will do," he said slowly. "The post is yours, if you care to take it. The wages are fifty shillings a week."

"I am very thankful indeed for your kindness," I gratefully replied. "Where am I to go, and when?"

"You are engaged by Colonel Gravenall, of Charmingdene, St. Bree, Cornwall. He desires that the chosen applicant shall be sent at once. Could you go to Cornwall by the ten o'clock train to-night?"

"I can manage that quite easily," I rejoined; "that is, if you will advance me the fare."

"Yes; I will do that," he said, with another hard smile. "Meet me by the ticket office at Paddington Station to-night at half-past nine."

His hand reached for a large sheet of blue foolscap as he spoke, and I obeyed

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this hint that the interview was at an end. With a nod in the direction of his bent head, I took myself out of the room.

I HURRIED out with a great relief, and had almost reached the outlet of the dingy passage downstairs when I observed the slim outline of a girl silhouetted against the daylight in the doorway, coming in. I stepped closer to the doorway to allow her to pass, and great was my amazement as she approached to recognize in her the girl I had watched in the alcove of the Pageham some hours before. She gave me a quick glance as she went by, not as though she had seen me before, but merely the indifferent scrutiny of one person encountering another in a narrow way.

And in that moment I saw her more clearly than before; noted the sweet curves of her girlish grace, and the clear whiteness of her face in that shadowy passage like a Rembrandtesque effect. Above all, I noticed her eyes, as she hurried past with a gentle and almost inquiring glance towards me. They were beautiful eyes, with mysterious depths of the darkest blue, but the terror I had seen in them before was not visible now. Something of sadness there was, and perhaps a trace of care, but not more than you will occasionally meet in the proud, grave glance of a girl of our race.

Perhaps I had caught her look in an unconscious moment at the hotel, when she had thought herself completely alone in the midst of that chattering idle throng. Now she had put on her guard again. An English girl does not wear her heart on her sleeve, or expose her secret thoughts to the indifferent gaze of passers-by. But I knew she was in trouble and distress. Unconsciously she had revealed herself to me, and that first memory remained.

I turned and watched her going up the crooked stairs at the bottom of the passage until she was out of sight, then took my own way to the worn flagstones outside, wondering what had brought her to the place I had just left. Did she imagine that sealing-wax and the red tape of the law could cure the smart in a woman's soul? I knew something of the law and its ways. It has never yet, as I verily believe, healed a single human hurt. Yet this girl, with the stricken look in her eyes, had come to its retreat, seeking (as I supposed) the law's aid.

Some unknown impulse kept me lingering in the green shade of the trees of the square, waiting for the girl to reappear. I do not think it was with any intention of speaking to her when she came forth, and yet I stayed there. A public clock in the neighbourhood of Holborn struck five as I waited, and another more distant took up the chime. As the strokes died away two people emerged from the ancient passage opposite the square and made their way towards the narrow exit from the inn. My amazement was great when I beheld in them the girl of my thoughts, accompanied by the coffin-faced lawyer who had given me the job.

Mr. Trusibond and his companion passed through the narrow alley of the inn which led into Holborn.

After all, I considered, the girl's business with the lawyer was nothing to me. I would be much better employed in looking after my own. With this belated reflection of prudence I turned—although still somewhat reluctantly—to go on my way.

Darkness was beginning to fall, and the shops were lighting up. My lodgings were off the Edgware Road, and I set out into the dusk afoot. It was a long walk there, but I consoled myself with the knowledge that from there it was but a short distance to carry my suitcase to Paddington for my night journey to Cornwall.

I reached my lodgings with a light heart, and pondered my next move. I decided to pack my few belongings in my shabby suitcase, and to leave it strapped and ready in my room until it was time to go to the station. Far away in Cornwall a job was waiting for me, and with that knowledge I couldn't sit still to wait for the time of the train. So I went out into the Edgware Road and stared into the shop windows, anxious for the hours to go. I had no need for dinner after

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lunching so well, but I should have dearly liked a cigarette.

As time lagged onward I had strange thoughts. Privation and past disappointments filled me with fear. My first feeling of exultation was gone, and instead I was seized with the dread that this wonderful post in Cornwall might turn out a hoax, after all. Suppose the lawyer was not at Paddington to meet me? In that case I would be not only penniless, but homeless as well, doomed to wander about London streets all night with a suitcase in my hand. For I had told my landlady I was going, and she, after the manner of her kind, had promptly let my bedroom to someone else. So if Mr. Trusibond failed to put in an appearance, I had nowhere in the wide world to go or to stay.

I kept my appointment to the stroke of the clock, and great was my relief when my eye fell upon Mr. Trusibond at the ticket window, a self-contained and saturnine figure of a man. He made no sign of recognition when he saw me, nor did he come forward to greet me in any way. Instead, I observed him methodically taking his place in the group of intending passengers at the window, some Treasury notes in his hand. I realized that he had, with legal caution, withheld the purchase of my ticket until he saw me on the station ready to go. With a vengeance that was the boot on the other foot. I thought of my own earlier fears, and could now afford to smile at myself.

In a moment or two Mr. Trusibond joined me where I stood waiting, and handed me the railway ticket without speaking a word. I looked at it—it was a ticket to Penzance, single and third-class. Having given this over, the lawyer fell into line alongside of me, and in silence we proceeded down the platform towards the waiting train.

IT WAS nearing the time of departure. The hands of the station clock moved forward. Ten minutes to ten. People hurried along, frantically looking for seats—the usual throng of pallid souls with crude luggage who are always to be found on English railway stations at night. Through a swinging door I espied an empty third-class apartment, and installed myself within. Mr. Trusibond looked through the door at me, like a man in some doubt what to do. I noticed that he still held the change from my ticket in his hand—a note, some silver coins, and a copper or two. He turned them over with a doubtful finger, as if weighing some pecuniary point. A bell clanged on the station near him, and seemed to quicken his thought. Hastily he singled out the note from the coins, and held it through the open window to me.

"Ten shillings!" he said suddenly; "to be deducted from your wages—for expenses on the journey down." He spoke indistinctly, like a man talking to himself. "The fare Colonel Gravenall will pay."

I thanked him, and he turned as if to leave me; then changed his mind and came back.

"No! Half-a-guinea. Better make it half-a-guinea while I'm about it. A more professional sum—for—for one who has been acquainted with the law." He made this explanation in the most distant voice, as he pressed another sixpence into my palm. But I thought his face lightened a little as he spoke.

Again he fell back, and I thought this time he had gone for good, but again he returned.

"Well, I'll bid you good-bye, Mr. Haldham, and—and—good luck." And with that he thrust out his hand.

We shook hands, and he went away. A bell clanged again. Paddington Station and its officials began to slide away. The train gathered speed, and we steamed out into the night.

Sleep came to me in snatches on the journey down, stretched on the slippery-cushioned seat. At Exeter I went for some tea in the refreshment room, and when I returned to the carriage it was nearly full up. The fresh passengers were Cornish tin-miners, on their way to work. They smoked shag in cutty pipes, and talked horse-racing in a slow Cornish

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drawl. At seven o'clock we reached Truro, and I began to look forward to my journey's end.

It came presently, with the grey castle of St. Michael crowning the Mount, the wide blue bay, and at last Penzance itself. Passengers streamed from the train towards the barrier, followed by bag-laden porters. I had thought the holiday season over, but found myself in the midst of a belated invasion of American tourists, who were calling loudly for vehicles and criticizing the Cornish landscape. Passively I waited until these enthusiasts had left the station for their hotel. Newlyn and Madron Church were not for me, nor ancient Cornish crosses and Druidical remains. Cornwall had known me in other days, and had shown me its cromlehs, logan stones, black cairns, and giants' caves. I was aware that it was the last stronghold of Ancient Britain, and I had even read Mr. Ruskin's criticism of Turner's picture of the Land's End. My present duty was to seek out my new employers without delay, in order to act as chauffeur to a nephew who had the fancy to be driven about the countryside at night.

I set about doing so as soon as the coast was clear. Giving up my ticket at the barrier, I asked a direction at the first shop I came to outside. The shopkeeper, a surly figure of a Cornish grocer busily slicing bacon with a great knife, hardly deigned to look up as he answered that he had never heard of Colonel Gravenall or Charmingdene. At the next shop a barber with an open razor in his hand gave me a similar but more courteous reply. Two more shops and I was no better off, and so it went on, down the street.

It puzzled me to find that my new employer was so little known. Even the policeman of whom I inquired as I crossed the road could tell me nothing of him or his house. I was turning away from this official, greatly perplexed, when it occurred to me to ask him if he could direct me to St. Bree. Hitherto I had merely asked for my employer and his residence by their names.

The policeman, a large dark man with a meditative eye, said yes, he knew St. Bree.

"The house I want is at St. Bree," I explained. "Will you tell me how to get there?"

He lifted his hand and pointed with his forefinger in the direction of the distant hills.

"St. Bree is a good five miles yonder, in the middle of the moors."

I looked from his pointing finger to him. "And how do I find my way?" I asked.

I was to follow the road out of town, he told me, until it divided into two, when I was to take the high one on the right, for the lower road ran on to Land's End and the sea. The higher road climbed across the moors, and at the end of two miles and a furlong or so would bring me to a granite roadside cross, or "crass," as he called it. From the cross I was to make my way over the moors to the highest point I could see.

"But how will I know the highest point when I reach it?" I interrupted in some surprise.

"Because you cannot mistake it," was his reply. "St. Bree is the loneliest and highest place in Cornwall. Four parishes meet there by a holed stone, and they all slope downward to the moors or sea. Keep across the moors until ye come to a spot where everything is beneath ye, and you'll be there."

I thanked him for this rather Celtic direction, and departed upon my way.

Chapter 2

THE HOUSE BY "THE OYSTERS"

■ I PUT my best foot foremost for "the loneliest and highest place in Cornwall," the hamlet of St. Bree, where four parishes met by a holed stone, and all sloped downward to moors and sea. The heather stretched away on my right hand, the sea shimmered to the left; Penzance, holy headland of St. Anthony, lay behind me in the rear. Before me climbed the rugged

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track which led to St. Bree and Charmingdene.

The day showed signs of fairness; the sun had cleared the distant hills, and looked down upon me like an inquiring eye, as if seeking to know my business among those Cornish moors. I trudged steadily on, the road ever rising before me, and winding away inland from Mount's Bay, which presently disappeared from view. At first I saw some scattered dwellings—cottages and a stone farmhouse or two—but soon I passed into a desert of moors, covered with purple heather and furze. Through it the road crept upward, until it brought me to a summit with a granite cross, with a view of the "hill of fires" and the western sea, but no sight of the lonely hamlet of St. Bree. That, apparently, was still farther on. Only the moors in their solitude surrounded me, with no sign of life as far as the eye could see.

I went on my way through country now strewn with boulders, the way running level for a couple of miles or more, and then the road was crossed by another worn track. There was a large flat stone by the roadside, marked to show the traveler which direction to go, but the lichen and moss grew so thick upon the surface that it was impossible to make out the lettering which they hid. I was at some pains to scrape away these growths in order to get to the inscriptions beneath, and while thus at work with my penknife I heard the crunch of wheels upon the road.

Looking up, I saw a cart jogging towards me from the way I had come—a kind of market cart, driven by an elderly bearded man. At sight of him I held up a detaining hand. He checked the shaggy white horse between the heavy shafts, and stared down at me with inquisitive dark eyes.

"Where is St. Bree?" I asked him.

"Yonder." He pointed vaguely with his whip across the distant moors. "I'se going theer naow."

"How far?"

"About five miles."

Five miles! I had walked that distance already, so it dawned upon me that I must have lost my way. And, carrying my suitcase, I had no fancy to double the score. Besides, hunger was already beginning to grip me hard. I looked up at the man in the cart.

"Is there an inn at St. Bree?" I asked.

The fellow grinned down at me with a sheepish and reminiscent eye. "Ay, iss; The Running Harse."

"Good!" I said with a nod. "Then will you give me a lift as far as St. Bree and The Running Horse for half-a-crown?"

He smiled broadly at the offer, and invited me to "Joomp up." I did so, and we jogged on.

We clattered into a hamlet with one stony street, but the only living being I saw was a Cornish policeman in a straw helmet sunning himself by a granite cross in the middle of the road. Behind him was an old and dilapidated church, and a creaking signboard on the other side of the way proclaimed an inn. The man in the marketing cart drew rein, and pointed to the sign with his whip. "The Running Harse," said he.

I paid him his half-crown and got down. Out of the corner of my eye I observed that he and the policeman by the cross stared hard after me as I entered the inn. I found myself in a mean sort of bar, sanded, with a counter on which stood a barrel of beer, some bottles on a shelf behind, and a dangling notice which read, *Poor Trust is Dead, Killed by Bad Pay.* The odour of the place might have hastened the demise, for it smelled intolerably of rank tobacco and bad beer. Great flies droned on the sloppy counter, among the wet rings of overnight beer, but no other form of life could I see.

I knocked loudly on the counter. After the lapse of some moments I heard a footstep responding to the summons, thumping heavily down wooden stairs. Then a door behind the bar opened, and a man appeared.

He was a great rough Cornishman, heavy-jowled and dark-visaged, and of immense size. Had he worn wolf-skins and borne a stone axe I should have felt no surprise, for he looked like a cave

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man emerging from his cave. His small eyes, set beneath beetling brows in a face almost covered with hair, scanned me suspiciously while he waited for me to speak.

"Can I have some breakfast here?" I inquired.

"We doan't lay ourselves out to visitors," was the uncompromising reply, delivered in a thick guttural voice which matched the man.

"An egg and a cup of tea will do," I said undauntedly. "I've just come from Penzance, on my way to Colonel Gravenall's place. Can you direct me how to get there?"

I'd have sworn that at the mention of my future employer's name he gave a start. He cast a quick darting glance at me from his deep-set eyes, then threw open the door behind him and shouted "Hespeth!" within. And after the lapse of a moment I saw a girl's face framed in the doorway, looking at us both.

She was tall, with pretensions to prettiness; a true Cornish lass of the wilds, red-lipped, dark-eyed and sturdy, with a tawny mane of dark hair.

"What be ye wantin'?" she inquired of the cave man.

He nodded towards me. "Here be a gentleman going to Charmingdene, who wants a bit o' breakfast here first," he said in his gruff voice.

"Charmingdene!" The girl Hespeth uttered the name with a faint cry of surprise, looking from the landlord to me and back again.

"Ay, iss; Charmingdene," retorted the landlord, with a significant nod.

I could make nothing of this, and sought to put an end to it.

"I am hungry, and have been traveling all night," I said. "Even if I am going to Charmingdene, I should like some breakfast before I go. Surely such a request is not unreasonable, even in a Cornish inn."

"We doan't get never a visitor in this part of the world," muttered the landlord hesitatingly, but the girl replied:

"I will get you some breakfast, sir. Will you come in?"

She unfastened the flap of the bar counter as she spoke, and I followed her through. She invited me to enter an inner room behind the bar, and when I was within it, she shut the door behind her, then looked at me again. Her dark eyes took me in curiously, and I saw her breast heaving beneath her faded dress. Then she lowered her glance suddenly, with a trace of colour in her cheeks.

"I'll bring you breakfast in a few minutes, sir, if you'll sit down for a while," she said, in a low voice. With that she went quickly into the passage, leaving me to myself.

THE ROOM in which she left me displayed as heterogeneous an assortment of furniture as a showroom in the Tottenham Court Road. Queen Anne chairs, an Indian lacquered table, ivory chessmen with carved elephants for castles, Japanese bowls exquisitely traced—such things are not usually found in the interior of English inns. Then I remembered I was in Cornwall, and smiled. How many ships, bringing such largess, had been smashed to pieces on Cornish rocks in years gone by! These pieces of furniture and others like them were doubtless the relics of other days when Cornish wreckers offered up each night their simple prayer: "Lord, give us this day our daily wreck."

These thoughts were running through my mind when the girl Hespeth returned with a tray. She set out on the table—not the Indian lacquered one, but another of humbler wood—a dish of fried eggs, cold meat, brown bread and saffron cake. These viands and an earthenware pot of tea completed the repast. The girl put the dishes down and spread a cloth, glancing at me demurely as she did. Having set out the food she was slowly making to retire, when I stopped her with a question.

"Can you tell me where Charmingdene is?"

She gave such a start as the innkeeper had done, anl almost dropped the brass tray she was carrying. Then she stood, staring at me with rounded eyes.

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"Charmingdene?" she echoed nervously. "You'll be meaning the house by The Oysters, I suppose?"

"I know nothing about that," I rejoined. "I mean the place where Colonel Gravenall lives. That is where I want to go."

She came closer with a steadfast gaze, as if she saw something curious in my face.

"Ay, that's the place," she said. "It is called the house by The Oysters in these parts. Two miles across the moors from here it is—maybe a trifle more. Dost'ee want to go theer, did ye say?"

"Yes; and quickly, if you'll kindly tell me how, my girl."

"My name's Hespeth, if you please," she answered, with a coquettish toss of her mane of hair.

"Then, Hespeth, how do I get to this place by The Oysters?"

"It's as straight as you ca'an go from this dure, by the track leadin' across the moors. You must follow it arver until you come to a cromleh and a crass. There, wheer it branches, teuk the sheep path to the Kissing Stones, and you'll see The Oysters below on your left hand. The house is just beyond, in the hollow which you'll see as you keep gooen on."

"And what are The Oysters?"

"Great heaps of stunes, piled loose atop of one another. You'll maybe see them shaak a bit in th' wind, like a logan stune. It's a dreary part of the moors, and the house you want is the only place nigh thereabouts for miles around."

"I'm much obliged to you, Miss Hespeth. But tell me, why did you start when I asked you the way there?"

She gave another start at that, then looked at me sideways from her greenish dark eyes, like a cat.

"Come, you may as well tell me."

She hesitated, then lifted her dark and pretty face to mine.

"Why do you waant to go theer? They never have visitors, so fur as I know."

"Well, I can hardly describe myself as a visitor," I replied. "I'm going there as chauffeur, to drive Colonel Gravenall's car. I was engaged in London yesterday for the job."

Her eyes rested for a brief moment on my hand upon the table, then slyly sought my face.

"You don't look much like a shaffer—not like theer last un, at least. Bill Colebrook had harder hands than yours. And he didn't wear no ring."

"That's what I am, nevertheless," I rejoined, a trifle disturbed at her words and glancing down at my father's signet ring. "I've been out of work for some time, and was glad to get something to do."

She nodded as though she understood.

"Well, I don't envy you your job. It's a quare place, this house by The Oysters—very quare."

"In what way is it queer?"

"There be strange doings theer."

"What do you mean by strange doings?"

"Nobody can say that."

"Then why do you call them strange?"

I was prompted to get the truth out of her, and went nearer to her side. She looked at me obliquely, but at first hesitated to speak. Then her voluptuous lips parted to speak.

"Because—because—"

The sound of a door, quietly opened, interrupted us. I looked round, and saw the landlord of The Running Horse. His vast bulk seemed to fill the open doorway to overflowing, as he stood there moodily regarding us. The girl picked up her tray and vanished without a word. The door closed behind the innkeeper, and I turned to my breakfast.

When I had eaten it and rung the bell to settle the score, it was the innkeeper who came to receive it. I got upon my feet and bade him good day. He gave me a surly brief nod in return. Picking up my suitcase, I went into the passage which led out of the inn. As I made my way forward I saw a figure crouched in a dark corner, as if waiting to encounter me. Drawing nearer, I saw it was the girl Hespeth. Before I could speak she laid a warning finger on her lips, and with a quick furtive action thrust a bit of paper in my hand. Then, without uttering a

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word, she turned and then she vanished within.

SURPRISED AT this incident, I set foot from the doorway of this extraordinary inn, but when I reached the granite cross in the middle of the road I paused to light a cigarette. In the act of doing so I glanced back, and saw the face of the giant innkeeper framed in the dirty window of his bar, staring hard after me. Standing by the roadside, I unrolled the paper Hespeth had given me, and with some difficulty made out the faintly penciled words:

Because they are mad. Take care.

I read and read this message with rather mingled feelings, staring down at it in my open hand, and wondering what it meant. A warning of such a nature from such a source was remarkable enough, but after thinking it over carefully I did not attribute very much importance to it just then. Villagers in country regions often have strange notions of their social superiors, especially if the latter keep to themselves. The cruelest slanders in the world find their beginnings in the two centres of English rural life—the village taproom and the church. I had been brought up in the country, and I knew. Nor had the inmates of this unusual inn struck me as particularly sane, if it came to that.

With these thoughts I dismissed the matter from my mind, and tore up Hespeth's note.

I walked on. I was now in the midst of a great stretch of brown and purple heather which ran without sign of life to the distant sea. An intense stillness surrounded me which weighed on my spirits a little as I went swiftly along. There is a sober melancholy about Cornish moors which depresses the mind. At least, they have that effect upon me, so steeped they are in the outlook of age, so sad and unutterably alone. The sombre monotone of colour fading into hazy distances or a grey cold sea has nothing of juvenescence or life. It has something of death in its tint. Unconsciously it coloured my thoughts as I walked. I mused over all the Cornish legends I had ever read; of giants, spectres, and misshapen dwarfs who in the ancient writings of Cornish tradition were once the sole denizens of these barren hills.

A turn of the path brought me to the opening of a wider amphitheatre, with a valley spread out between hills, and great stones strewn about their slopes. And here, as I looked down, I had my first glimpse of the two pillars of rocks which the girl at the inn had called by the name of The Oysters.

I have never seen anything more striking than those two great obelisks which rose beneath me in that lonely spot. From the moors they stood like monoliths, though not of a single stone. As I looked down upon them, I understood the meaning of the local name. They were actually a conglomeration of shallow and slightly concave stones, resting one upon another like stacks of plates or oyster shells.

Oyster shells! My imagination peopled that empty glen with monstrous Cornish giants fifty feet high, and pictured them squatting on their haunches devouring oysters like vast soup tureens, then flinging the empty shells one on the other until they rose skyward in two tottering piles. A crude cylinder of reddish-grey rock near by might have been the pepper-pot, and a twenty-foot sliver of granite, which seemed to have been thrust point downward into the turf, would have made an excellent oyster knife. And the great holed stones scattered about at my feet suggested table napkin rings.

No; not napkin rings, but the Kissing Stones!

Kissing stones? Then they must be giants' kissing stones, without a doubt. It was like a picture by Caravaggio in the grand style, with the savage contrast of uncouth rocks, naked moors, and a dim and lonely sky. As I looked at those two monuments of loosely piled stones known as The Oysters, they seemed to sway and nod slightly in the faint misty air. That may have been fancy or not, but it was a disturbing spectacle to me.

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I looked about me. Those weird stones were The Oysters without any doubt, so I had reached the spot where Hespeth had told me to come. Where was Charmingdene? According to Hespeth, it was in the hollow a little farther on.

I did not see anything of the place until I had walked on a little farther, and then it came suddenly into view across the shoulder of an intervening hill, lying in an unexpected crease of the moors, like a house trying to shrink beneath them out of sight. The Oysters might almost have served as entrance gates for the long winding downward approach. Their twisted bulk, tilted grotesquely against the sky, helped to obscure the vista of this house which was inappropriately called Charmingdene. Approaching nearer, I distinguished clearly that it lay back a little from a white empty road, behind a hedge enclosing a poor semblance of garden such as the salt air of Cornwall must inevitably produce.

It was a dark square house of stone, strongly built, set in the middle of the great empty moors, with one distant faint glimpse of the sea. As I have hinted, it strangely belied its name. There was little to charm in that dark solitude, and much (to my thought) to repel. Certainly that bleak and barren valley was about the last spot where I would have chosen to make my home.

FROM WHERE I stood I observed that the blinds of the upper front windows were down, and the only sign of human life about the place was a thin thread of smoke from a chimney in the rear. The house looked dreary and deserted, and I wondered if any traffic ever passed over that lonely white road which ribboned past the house into the vague solitude of the moors.

But Charmingdene was my destination whether I liked it or not, and I had to be on my way. I picked up the suitcase which I had laid on a kissing stone while looking about me, and trudged on down the hill. Now the house began to stand out clear as a picture in the valley beneath. And the nearer I came to it the drearier it appeared. Again I wondered why the place should have been put there away from everything, in the midst of the moors. It was a grey ghost of a house in its loneliness, and it looked like a tortured ghost too, battered and helpless, with the evergreens in its pretence of a garden torn away by the bitter west wind.

There was a side entrance and drive between uprights, leading around to the rear, but I passed it for the small rustic gate in front of the house. It opened upon the garden, and a gravel path which ran to the front door. I unfastened the gate and passed through, but was not destined to reach the house so easily as I supposed.

As the gate clicked behind me, I heard a gruff bark. Looking ahead, I saw a dog stealing around the side of the house like a shadow, to come stalking down the gravel path as if to dispute my farther way. He was a great gaunt animal of wolfhound type, though he seemed larger to me. But whatever his breed might be, I did not like his looks. There was a ferocious gleam in his eye, and the manner in which his tongue curled round his teeth boded no good to me. Midway in the path he stood, and the coarse hair on his neck ruffled ominously as I drew near.

I was dubiously wondering whether I dared beard this lion in the path when the front door was flung suddenly open, and to my great relief a man appeared. He looked towards the dog and myself, and then called sharply:

"Pedro, come here!"

The dog turned reluctantly towards the figure I saw outlined in the threshold of the open door. He stood at the top of a short flight of stone steps looking at me as I approached.

I had hardly made another step forward when a peremptory voice barred my way.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

The look he cast down at me as he uttered these words was by no means a favourable augury of my future in that house, if the ordering of it was in his

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hands. Tall, thin, and dark, with a sallow face of the Anglo-Indian type, surmounted by strongly marked eyebrows which almost met across the bridge of a haughty beaked nose, I was not at all prepossessed in favour of Colonel Gravenall, as I strongly suspected the man on the top of the steps to be. I have disliked some Anglo-Indians for their arrogance and bumptious ways, but never had I encountered such an insolent specimen of the class as this. And my new employer seemed, at the outset, to have little more liking for me. He kept glancing at me as though he had reason to be suspicious of my presence there. It was a strange look, which appeared to me to oscillate between repugnance and fear, just as if I had been some noxious serpent of the Indian jungle advancing with deadly intent towards him up his garden path.

In a voice which I considered in keeping with my new character, I replied to the question he had asked.

"I am Richard Haldham, sir, the chauffeur engaged by Mr. Trusibond in London yesterday."

I heard him sigh as if in relief. His restless black eyes, which had something of a snake's gleam in their cast, scanned my ordinary English exterior and then sought my face again.

"You came down by the night train?" he said at last.

I nodded assent, but he still seemed doubtful in his mind. His next question was spoken sharply, accompanied by the same suspicious glance.

"Can you drive a—car?"

He named a new and costly make just beginning to have a vogue, but I was ready for him there.

"Yes, sir. I know it thoroughly."

"And have you ever been abroad?"

"I was in France and Germany during the war, but Mr. Trusibond said that did not matter."

He nodded absently, and then put the same question that the lawyer had asked:

"You have never been in South America or Peru?"

I shook my head, and he appeared to reflect.

"Ah, well, I've no doubt it's all right. You'll be wanted to take the car out to-night, and you had better give it a good overhauling first. The last man I had was a clumsy fool and Cornish roads are hard on good cars. That will do for the present, I think."

He had been holding the door closed behind him during this interview, but he now flung it open and roared within, "Mrs. Truedick!" and again, "Mrs. Truedick!"

There was a rather lengthy pause, and I wondered who Mrs. Truedick might be. Then a patter of feet responded to the summons, and an old woman's figure appeared in the shadow of the passage behind where he stood. "Iss, maister," I heard her say; "here I be."

"Take this young man with you, and show him where he is to sleep."

I saw him bend over her, and roar these words in her ear. She nodded a palsied head in understanding, and, then, to my surprise, trotted down the steps. Colonel Gravenall stood where he was, looking down at us both from the top.

"Don't forget to have the car ready for to-night," he said to me; "but I shall see you again before then."

With these words he retreated into the passage and shut the door behind him, leaving Mrs. Truedick and myself outside.

■ THE OLD woman beckoned me to follow her around the side of the house, and led the way down the side entrance to a brick building I had seen from the road, and guessed to be the garage. When we came to it Mrs. Truedick fitted a key which unlocked one half of the wooden front, revealing a large car within, and a flight of wooden stairs in the far corner of the interior leading to a loft or upper chamber above. My guide pointed with her finger to an open trap-door at the top of the stairs.

"That's your room—up theer," she said in her high-pitched voice.

"Oh, is it?" I replied, but she stood there mumbling to herself, with no sign of having heard. So, suitcase in hand, I essayed the climb to my new abode. With

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blinking eyes and nodding head the old woman remained watching me as I mounted the stairs, but when I reached the trap door at the top she had gone.

The upper room was more comfortable than I had expected to find—a rough apartment some ten feet by twelve, with a bed by the far wall, a chair beside it, a mirror on a shelf, and a strip of matting upon the floor.

For the next couple of hours or more I was busy overhauling the car which I was that night to drive. It was a fine powerful car in good running order, for I satisfied myself on that point by taking it out by the big gate and trying it on a level strip of the moors.

When I came back to the garage Mrs. Truedick was awaiting me there.

"Your dinner's ready for ye," she said, with mumbling lips, and hobbled back across the yard.

I went across to the square flagged kitchen, where a meal of meat and potatoes and cold apple pie and cream was laid for one. Mrs. Truedick served me with this rather Cornish repast, but without words. It was so quiet in the empty, echoing kitchen that she and I might have been the only living souls amid those Cornish moors. I could hear nothing save the occasional shuffling of her slippered feet on the stone floor.

There was no sound overhead. The house was as silent as the grave. After a while I looked towards Mrs. Truedick with the idea of entering into speech with her, for that uncanny silence was beginning to get on my nerves. The old woman was busy stirring something in a pot over the fire, peering into it all the time.

I waited until she turned round, then addressed some trivial remark to her. She left her pot and came to the table, holding one hand to her ear, and staring at me with eyes more red-rimmed than before, on account of the smoke from the fire.

"Do ye waant more potatoes?" she mumbled at me.

"No, no!" I shook my head vehemently.

"Then what do ye waant?"

She looked at me, and I saw suspicion in the depths of her eyes.

"I said this was a lonely place," I cried in despair, "A lo-ne-ly—p-p-p-place!"

My raised voice came back to me in a kind of echoing shout which quite startled me. But the old woman gave no sign of having heard, and after a brief pause she turned and went back to the fire.

I finished my dinner in silence. I had been engaged as a chauffeur-mechanic, and there was no undertaking to supply me with light and agreeable conversation at meals. If my employer consigned me to the care of a shriveled old creature as deaf as a Cornish adder, and perhaps mad to boot, I had no cause of complaint. I ended my meal in silence, and left Mrs. Truedick stirring at her pot.

It was my first care to look for a screwdriver. I found one in a box of tools in the garage, and mounting with it to my bedroom unscrewed the dormer window from its place, where it had been permanently fastened by my predecessor. Through the aperture rushed a gush of sweet air, tasting of heather and sea. By standing on the bed I had a view of the moors, with a glimpse of a hill at the back of the house. The house itself I could not see: it was to the front; but by craning my neck from the window I made out a bit of the white road which ran past it across the moors.

My room being considerably sweeter, I went downstairs again to correct a slight fault in the running of the engine which had made itself manifest in the course of the trial, for I had no wish to risk any mishap on my first nightly drive. I was hard at it in my overalls beneath the car when I heard the sound of footsteps approaching the garage. Scrambling out from underneath, I saw Colonel Gravenall standing there, with the dog Pedro beside him.

He looked at the spanner in my hand, and then at the car.

"The way of your drive to-night will be along the road which runs from the house over the moors to the sea." From the open door of the garage he pointed to

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the road I had seen from my window upstairs. "The road is not used now, and was made many years ago to give access to the tin mine at Point St. Bree, a small rocky bay at which it ends. That was in the old tin-mining days. The great St. Bree mine has been closed down long since, and the abandoned workings extend for a considerable distance beneath the sea."

"Very well, sir," I replied. "And how far am I to go along this road?"

"Follow it until you come to the sea," he rejoined hastily. "Across the moors the sea is only five miles from Charmingdene, but by the road it is nearly fifteen more. The road winds away inland for a great part of the distance, then sweeps back again in a great curve up a hill from where you can see the sea beneath. You must be careful when you reach this point. The road falls swiftly to Point St. Bree, but ends abruptly not far from the edge of the rocks, above a little spit or promontory which juts out into the sea. You are to follow the road almost to this spot.

"When you see the cliffs ahead you must look about you carefully, watching for a finger-post on your left hand, which in the old days used to indicate a footpath leading to the pit-shaft of the mine. At the finger-post you will pull up, and the two persons you are to drive will leave the car for the purpose of taking a short walk. You will wait at this spot until they return, and then you will drive them straight back home. On no account attempt to take the car beyond the finger-post, for the road falls away dangerously to the cliffs a little farther on. Do you understand your instructions clearly?"

I had heard them wonderingly, but there was no doubt they were plain.

"Yes, Colonel Gravenall. I suppose I am not likely to miss this finger-post in the dark?"

"There is no danger of that. But as an additional precaution keep a sharp look out for Cape Cornwall looming out of the sea in the north. You will see it silhouetted against the skyline at the last sharp downward turn, where the road drops away to the sea. Check the speed of your car as soon as your eyes take in the outline of the cape, and watch keenly as you go down for the finger-post on your left hand."

"I understand, sir."

"Very good. Then have the car in readiness for to-night, at about eight o'clock. And one thing more. The occupants of the car will not speak to you and you are not to attempt to address yourself to them. Those are the whole of my instructions, and I trust you will be careful to execute them. Now, you quite follow what you have to do?"

I bowed my head as an indication that I did, and he turned away with the dog at his heels.

Chapter 3

LAND'S END

PUNCTUALLY AT eight o'clock I was ready in the garage with the lighted car, but another hour or more passed away before my wait was ended by words from the darkness outside.

"Will you bring the car to the front of the house now, if you please?"

I started at this address in a clear and feminine voice, coming from beyond the range of my vision out of the gloom of the flagged yard. I had not expected to find a girl dwelling at Charmingdene, but had waited to be summoned by Colonel Gravenall, or the red-eyed old woman who served my food. My cigarette dropped fom my fingers as I went outside, but I was too late. The owner of the sweet voice had gone as noiselessly as she had come, and I was unable to catch a glimpse of her just then. But I lost no time in obeying her bidding, and a few minutes later I had the car waiting in front of the house.

The night was a dark one, but the powerful headlights cast large circles of light. They shone on the garden hedge, the purple moor, and on the white emptiness of the lonely road which was

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the route of my night's drive. A lamp was lit in one of the rooms upstairs, gleaming from the chinks between the drawn blind. Once a shadow flitted across the windowpane. I sat there some time longer, then my ear caught the click of a lifted latch.

Light streamed from an open door and the crunch of footsteps sounded on the gravel path. Without turning my head I glimpsed three figures approaching. One was a woman, but I could tell nothing more. They came down the path and passed through the garden gate, but I sat motionless in my seat, looking straight ahead. Then I wondered if it was my business to jump down and open the car door. But before I could determine this point a voice reached me from the darkness of the road. It was Colonel Gravenall. He stood beside me, repeating the earlier instructions he had given me about the destination to which I was to drive.

Possibly he did this to engage my attention while the others entered the car. At any rate, while he was speaking the door of the car was softly closed. Colonel Gravenall glanced quickly behind him, and then spoke his last word.

"Follow the road to this place, Haldham, and wait by the finger-post until your passengers have had their walk and returned to the car. It will not be necessary for you to leave your seat at all. You quite understand that? Very well. You can start at once."

With a bound the great car swept away along the curve of the road, which wound like a white ribbon through the empty darkness of the moors.

I had never driven a better one, nor one which inspired me with such confidence from the start.

Reassured on this score, I began to ponder the mystery of Charmingdene again, and especially the mystery of this strange drive.

The miles slipped past with speed. The great car made light of them, and on that lonely road I let it go. There was no danger in that, for I had the deserted highway to myself. The wind blew sweetly cool to my face, and nothing stirred to check that glorious speed. I felt alone on the moors of Cornwall, the one sentient thing in an empty land, with only the white road spinning away from the car's lights into the dark heart of the moors, as though beckoning me to follow on.

The road took me up hill and down dale, at first winding inland away from the sea, though I could sometimes feel the tang of its saltness on my cheeks, mingling with the peaty sweetness of the soft moorland air. But in a while the sea breeze grew keener, with a taste on the lips like strong wine, and the roar of hidden waters began to sound loud in my ears. At length a sharp turn of the ascent brought me out on the edge of a round hill, with the sea rolling to a clouded horizon beneath.

This was the spot where Colonel Gravenall had warned me to look out for my journey's end. I checked the speed of the car immediately, and began a slow and careful descent.

A grim scene stretched before me—a grand and wonderful outline of the Cornish coast. To the north the low line of Cape Cornwall appeared in the great grey rollers like a brown smear. Away to the left ran black and broken cliffs, and in the haze beyond them rose the frowning bulk of Land's End. I saw it like a shadow, with the sullen red light from Wolf Rock, where the spirit dog of storms is said to howl at night for human souls. Farther south, the great head of Mullion Cove rested savagely on the sea, and beyond, at the nethermost point of England, the light of the Lizard spurted white into the sky. And as far as the eye could reach the waters of the Atlantic rolled and thundered in creaming surf.

Slowly and with exceeding care I took the car down the slippery slope on the farther side of the hill. The road still ran some distance ahead, but it was rocky now, and wet from the drench of sea spray, as I supposed. As I descended, my eye searched the left side for the finger-post. Presently the headlight of the car picked it up—a white cruciform, leaning forward at a crazy angle, with the

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broken cross-piece bent. And at the same instant I caught sight of a short promontory of rock jutting into the water directly beneath—a level-topped platform of black granite which stretched out above the surface of the waves some three hundred yards or more into the boiling sea.

This I took to be Point St. Bree. I had reached my destination. A little farther on lay the end of the road. Beyond the next swift slope of descent was nothing; no road, but jagged rocks, and then—the sea. I pulled up the car on the inside of the finger-post, before the road began to fall sharply away, for my first care was to have plenty of room in which to turn the car around. The moment it came to a standstill I heard the click of an opening door. I looked round quickly, but I was too late. The car was empty. At the instant of stopping the occupants had got out and were gone.

I WAS somewhat nonplussed at this. My two passengers had undoubtedly disappeared; but where had they gone? Certainly not across the road before me, in the gleaming light cast by the car. They had made a quick departure into the darkness of the moors. The finger-post might point to some path I could not discern, leading perhaps to the sea. I do not know what put this idea into my head, unless it was that the cliffs seemed less dark than the moors. Faint light patches in the sky showed their outline, and the water washing at their base. I kept my eyes there, and a few minutes later I saw two figures appear as if by magic on the flat surface of the promontory which jutted into the sea below.

They were walking slowly up and down. So much I made out, though in the darkness and dashing spray I had but a dim view. Only once did I catch a fair glimpse of them. In that instant I had a brief vision of a man's figure shrouded in a flapping cloak, striding nervously with a girl at his side. At least, I supposed she was a girl, for the wind blew her raincoat about her upright, girlish slimness as she walked. Then the darkness and leaping sea-spray hid them again from my sight.

I was puzzled at their presence there. In all conscience they had chosen a dangerous place for a walk. Why did they want to wander on that dizzy shelf of rock, by the brink of a raging sea? Were they sweethearts, strolling in that strange spot? In another brief glimpse I saw the girl clinging to the man's arm. They were near the end of the promontory then. No; I could not imagine a man and a maid whispering their epithalamy in surroundings so weird. It was a black tryst for suicide, or a solitary heart in despair, but never for lovers to breathe eternal vows. I could make nothing of it, so lit a cigarette.

I smoked one cigarette after another, but still they did not return. I kept looking downward, but did not see them again. The shadows crept closer, hiding the promontory from sight, though I could still see the leaping spray. Perhaps an hour passed thus. And their return was a surprise to me, for they came back without making a sound. The first I knew of it was to hear the car door close. Then a soft voice reached me through the window of the car.

"Drive home now, please."

Again I recognized the voice of the girl who had asked me to bring out the car. I had the impulse to answer her, but did not speak. Homeward we sped along the dark, silent road. I was glad to leave sea and cliffs behind me, though my spirits drooped at the thought of more nightly expeditions to the same weird spot. My mind was heavy with a sense of the oddity of it all. I saw in it a symbol of eccentricity; almost of madness, as Hespeth had said. It was a strange situation in which to find oneself through the chance medium of an advertisement in *The Times*. Was insanity the explanation of it all? If not, what did this strange drive mean? Yet my employer seemed sane enough in his way, and the girl's voice had sounded sweetly sane too. The more I thought the more confused my mind became.

Nevertheless, I had no idea of leaving

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Charmingdene and going away—at least, not then. That was a decision which was not based on the state of my finances at all. Adventure calls to us all, and I shrugged aside thoughts of retreat until I had found out what these things meant. There were elements of the mysterious and the unknown in this adventure that might have lured a more matter-of-fact disposition than my own. As I had come I would stay, sleeping in the loft and taking my meals from the old woman in the kitchen, till the explanation of these strange events became clear. And that girl of the slender shape and soft sweet voice; what was her part in it all?

These were enigmas which held me in bonds at Charmingdene until they were solved. London seemed very far away just then.

The miles slipped past. The car threaded its way back across the moors. At length the dark bulk of Charmingdene appeared, a solitary outline against the sky. In a few moments we raced down to it, and I pulled up the car outside. I had hoped for a better view of my passengers as they got out, but that confounded Colonel Gravenall was in the way. He must have heard the car approaching, for he was standing at the garden gate when I drew up.

He walked quickly across the roadside towards the car. I have no doubt he did so to forestall my intention, because he stood in such a way as to obscure my view when the others got out. But he was not quite so successful as he hoped. In the darkness my eyes followed the three figures as they hurried through the gate.

Curiosity is an unmannerly foible at any time. Never was indulgence in curiosity less gratified. Up the gravel path the three hastened in dim outline, the tall man in the flapping cloak striding ahead, the girl and Colonel Gravenall walking in the rear. But it was on the foremost figure that my eyes were focussed. When I had seen him on the promontory his face had seemed obscured, and in that instant I learned the reason why. For as I stared after him in the garden I saw that his face was covered. His features were shrouded in a muffler which concealed them from my view.

They walked quickly into the dark and lonely house, and the door closed behind them.

I sat there staring after them. Once more my mind groped blindly for a key to this sombre mystery, but I could find no answer in my shaken soul. From this bemused condition I at length aroused myself to reality, and got down from my seat to open the side gate for the car.

THAT FIRST night at Charmingdene was the pattern of others ordered in similar way. The days were my own. I had nothing to do in them except look after the car and go to the kitchen for meals served by Mrs. Truedick, who seemed with myself to make up the staff of this remarkable house. The ancient dame and I got no nearer acquaintance as time wore on. Few words ever passed between us, and after one or two struggles with her deafness I finally gave over and occupied myself in fixing the garden.

I never saw my two strange passengers by day. What they did with themselves in the daytime I did not know.

Apart from Mrs. Truedick, the only inmate of the mysterious household with whom I came in contact was Colonel Gravenall, who occasionally strolled around the garden of a morning with the dog Pedro at his heels. Sometimes he spoke to me, sometimes not, but he gave me the idea that his first suspicions had gone, and that my efforts to improve the garden were the subject of his inspection made in a friendly way. But my own dislike of him remained unchanged, and I never spoke to him unless he first addressed me.

But with the fall of night and the hour came that strange drive in the car.

I never had a better view of my passengers than on the first night. They took good care of that, going and coming from the car as swiftly and noiselessly as ghosts. There was no moon just then, and the nights were uncommonly dark. Besides, the man's face was concealed, so what was the good? Perhaps I was not very keen

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to see him after that first shocked glimpse, when I had stared after his hidden face in a sort of horrified unbelief. And as for his companion, a belated sense of decency checked my desire to pry at a girl who so obviously did not wish to be seen by me.

But if I did not see the faces of those I drove, I began to perceive other things. There was one in particular which filled me with amaze, and deepened my original distrust of Colonel Gravenall. I will relate it so that you may judge whether my suspicions were justified or not. It occurred the third morning after my arrival at Charmingdene. I was in my bedroom above the garage at the time. Happening to look casually from the open windowpane I had removed, I saw Colonel Gravenall mounting the hill behind the house, with a long telescope tucked beneath his arm.

I watched him from the window-opening as he toiled upward, unconscious of my survey. Reaching the summit, he placed the instrument to his eye. Through it, he scanned long and anxiously the whole of the surrounding moors and the length of the white road which ran before the house.

This appeared rather a singular act to me. He was there for some time, and then he walked down the hill and into the house again. But it struck me as the kind of thing that might happen again. After that, I kept a close watch, and found that the performance was repeated every morning in the same way.

The place was remote from everything, in the desolate heart of the Cornish moors. What, then, had Colonel Gravenall to fear?

And no traffic ever passed along the white road. For a while I wondered why it was free from motor vehicles in an age when the repellent char-à-banc and detestable sidecar seem to penetrate into the most sacred places of the earth. Then I learned the reason why. The road was a private one, running through mining property, and Colonel Gravenall had obtained permission from the mining company which owned that part of the moors to close the road with a gate across it at a point where it debouched to the main thoroughfare, nearly a mile away. That was a fairly high-handed action for even a retired Anglo-Indian officer to do, unless (I thought of the telescope) the impelling motive was fear.

I have spoken of a single visitor. I did not see him until my third morning at Charmingdene, but thereafter he came every day. The first time I saw him, I was at work in the garden, tying up some hardly plants to enable them to endure the Atlantic winds. As I did so wheels crunched the roadway, and I looked up at the unaccustomed sound.

I was greatly surprised to see a small car of the runabout type in the act of pulling up outside the garden gate. In it was a solitary occupant—a bronzed and bearded man who appeared to me like a giant, from the stalwart dimensions of his upper frame. But when he descended, as he immediately did, I observed that he was a much smaller man than I had at first supposed, for his fine, upright body was set upon two dwarfed and twisted legs. He was not actually a cripple, for he walked (and briskly, too) without the help of a stick, but it was his face which attracted my attention chiefly just then.

Never had I seen a more striking face, nor one lit up by such a luminous pair of eyes. The head was massive, with the deep brows of the thinker. The remaining features were almost classic in their regularity and strength, though somewhat disfigured by an old scar near the mouth, which had slightly twisted the upper lip. In main essentials it was a Cornish face, though of the fair type; resolute, forceful, even a little hard in repose, if it had not been for the eyes. They were limpid and beautiful, of the true wistful Celtic blue-gray, but with a dark, straight challenge in their depths which seemed to reach and probe the person on whom they rested, and, with a piercing glance, read one through and through.

That, at least, was the impression they made upon me, in the quick look he threw at me as he came in the gate. He

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seemed surprised to see me there, and made as if to walk towards where I was at work in the garden bed. At that moment I saw that infernal wolfhound racing down the path toward where he stood.

"Look out for Pedro—the dog!" I cried.

"Thanks!" he answered, with a bright nod. "But Pedro and I are old friends." And indeed, to my astonishment, the great brute, which greeted me with a rumbling snarl whenever I attempted to make friends with it, was actually nuzzling its grim black nose into the capable white hand which hung at the visitor's side. I had never seen the dog display affection for its master in this manner, and the incident enhanced my favourable opinion of the stranger, whoever he might be. On that point I was not left long in doubt, for just then the thin figure of Colonel Gravenall appeared in the gravel path, in the wake of the dog.

"Good morning, Doctor Penhryn," I heard him say.

"Good morning, Colonel Gravenall. How is the patient this morning?"

Doctor and patient! At first blush this exchange of words seemed to strike at the roots of my fancied mystery. Had my imagination built up a theory of some hidden secret or meditated crime on no better foundation than a sick man in a lonely house? Here was a country medico, with his professionally bland and meaningless inquiry, who at one blow laid my structure of dark suspicions in ruins.

But the next instant all my former doubts returned. Ordinary invalids do not cover their faces and take long drives at night to Cornish cliffs, there to walk by a lonely sea, nor do their relatives sweep the country each morning with a telescope from the top of a hill.

I did not hear the Colonel's reply to Dr. Penhryn's words. The two walked up the path out of earshot, the dog running by the doctor's side. Nearly an hour passed, and still the dusty little runabout car waited outside the gate. Then the old woman summoned me to dinner, and I had perforce to go. When I went back to the garden after that meal, Dr. Penhryn's car was no longer there.

But I had not been back in the garden very long before Colonel Gravenall came forth again. When he reached me, he came straight to the point, speaking quickly and rather nervously, as it seemed to me.

"Haldham, I want you to drive me over to St. Just this afternoon," he said. "Have the car waiting in an hour."

"Very good, sir," I rejoined, and he turned away.

An hour later we were gliding through the wildness of the moors on this unexpected expedition.

THE AFTERNOON was not agreeable for a drive. It was a dull, dark day, and a stinging wind blew gustily across the moors. Inside, Colonel Gravenall was snug enough, but the sand carried by the wind lashed me like a whip, and sometimes got into my eyes.

When we reached the outskirts of this dismal place, St. Just, my employer, from inside the car, gave me the signal to stop. I came to a standstill, looking about me. We were at the entrance of a rather breakneck street. On one side of the way I saw a small, mean hotel of Cornish tone, on the other an uninviting butcher's shop.

Colonel Gravenall descended into a kind of courtyard with a large basket in his hand. First he told me to draw the car to the side of the street. When I had done so he asked me to get down, and then handed his basket to me. It came to me then what he was about to do. He intended to go shopping, and I was to carry the purchases as they were made.

This proved a correct presumption on my part. We made a round of various shops in turn, and Colonel Gravenall purchased all sorts of articles, which it fell to my lot to carry and to store in the waiting car. In the course of that expedition I learned why no tradesmen's carts ever called at Charmingdene. My employer laid in large stocks of all kinds of provisions, including some large

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loaves of bread. The bread I was especially glad to see, for I fancy we had had some of Mrs. Truedick's baking during the last few days, and I did not altogether care for her lightness of hand.

Before we had finished shopping the interior of the car was nearly full. Finally Colonel Gravenall went to the post-office and another small shop, where, to my surprise, he purchased chocolates and flowers, which he carried back to the car himself. When he had packed them away he surveyed the littered contents with a thoughtful eye. Then he turned to me.

"I think that is all, Haldham, except a case of wine. Will you drive to the George Hotel? It is at the end of the street, on this side."

I drove him to a more pretentious hotel than I had expected to see in that place, large and spacious, standing in its own grounds overlooking the sea. Here Colonel Gravenall got out again and went inside. A few minutes later two of the hotel employees came out carrying a case of wine, which under his directions they carefully stowed away inside the car. I expected now to be told to turn the car for home, but not so; for I heard Colonel Gravenall address me from the road, asking me to leave the car there and come inside for a little refreshment.

In some surprise I followed him into the hotel and to a private room retired and quiet, with one curtained window which looked out upon the sea. On the mahogany table stood a cobwebbed bottle with two wine glasses, and two chairs were drawn up. Colonel Gravenall took one, and pointed out the other to me. And when we were seated he asked me in a somewhat hesitating tone whether I would care to drink a glass of brown sherry wine.

I thanked him, though again with inward surprise. He poured out two glasses of the sherry with a careful hand, and pushed one towards me. I sipped it slowly in silence, not feeling myself called on to speak. The wine was choice, but brown sherry is not everyone's drink, and however much it may have appealed to the palate of my Anglo-Indian employer, a whisky and soda would have been more to my taste, especially after the dust of the drive. Colonel Gravenall sipped slowly and fingered his glass thoughtfully, and I could feel his dark glance settle on my face. At length he spoke.

"Well, Haldham, and how do you like your work at Charmingdene?"

By sheer unexpectedness this question almost pierced my guard.

"I hope I give you satisfaction, sir," was my meek reply.

My companion did not speak immediately, but slowly refilled his glass.

"I have had a letter from Mr. Trusibond, and he tells me more about you than I knew before," he said at length.

As I was not quite sure of what he meant by this, I held my peace. He went on, still in the same hesitating way.

"Although you have come to Charmingdene in a comparatively humble capacity, I am tempted by what Mr. Trusibond tells me to repose a certain amount of trust in you as—as a fellow-officer and a gentleman."

■ AGAIN HE paused, but I was still too much amazed to find words.

"There is something I wish to touch upon," he began again. "Mr. Trusibond, when he engaged you, gave you some particulars of the unhappy case of my nephew, did he not?"

"He told me a little about your nephew," I replied; "not very much. I understood Mr. Trusibond to say I was engaged to drive a young man suffering from a nervous disorder, the result of an illness abroad. He said he was an invalid in a bad state of health—nerves—which called for the utmost seclusion and quiet. Because of that he had to be driven out at night."

Colonel Gravenall glanced at me as if reassured.

"That is quite true. Edward Chesworth, my nephew, is suffering from a most unusual form of nervous disorder, which causes him to shun all society and to shrink from the sight of strangers. I will go further than this, Haldham, and tell

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you more. He in particular fears to encounter any persons he may have met in a—a former period of his life in another country—in South America and Peru, in fact.

"It was for that reason, my lawyer advertised for a chauffeur who had never been in those parts; for in the treatment of my nephew's disorder it is necessary to humour him in every way. Because of these considerations I have taken a house in this isolated place, and have arranged for these lonely drives at night, about which you have no doubt wondered since you came. By this means we contrive to give him a little fresh air, for he stays closely in his room all day. The young lady who accompanies him on his nightly drive is his sister and devoted nurse."

He stopped and looked at me, then added in a different voice:

"I have been frank with you, Haldham, and I have spoken to you with the utmost confidence. May I ask you to respect my words, and observe reticence about what you see at Charmingdene?"

He did not seem to expect an answer, but sat back as though the subject was closed. I kept silent, thinking over what he had said. His explanation struck me as excellently contrived, and adroitly calculated to lay some of the doubts which he guessed had arisen in my mind since coming there; but it was open to the fatal drawback that I utterly disbelieved him.

"There is another thing," he said: "if you ever see anyone approaching the house, Haldham, I wish you would let me know. I keep a sharp lookout myself, but there's the chance that I might be taken unawares. And the shock of seeing any strange face might be fatal to my nephew in his present state of health."

It seemed to me that this request rather gave him away, and revealed his actual purpose in bringing me there. I would have liked to tell him what I thought of this request to act as his spy, but prudent considerations prevailed. So I called up guile instead, with a nod which implied an affirmative to his request. And I'm afraid I muttered a word or two which made it even more plain.

His face brightened at my promise, and he uttered a brief word of thanks in his stiff way. We sat on for a while in silence, sipping our sherry, and looking out upon a melancholy sea. I began to think it was time we were getting back to Charmingdene, but it was not my place to speak. At length, to my great surprise, Colonel Gravenall turned and said to me:

"We will dine here, Haldham, before we return."

My manners scattered with my wits, and I did not thank him, as perhaps I should. For with his words there came to me a vision of a white road, black rocks, and a desolate sea.

"You have forgotten your nephew's nightly drive, Colonel Gravenall," I ventured to remind him. "We would not be back in time."

"There will be no drive this evening," he answered. "Dr. Penhryn is staying with my nephew to-night."

He rang the bell and ordered dinner to be served to us there. It appeared presently, well served, and with excellent wine. But it was not a convivial meal, and I wondered what had led my employer to adopt this friendly attitude.

Later we took our cigars to the window, and sat looking out. Twilight was spreading in shadowy peace upon the surface of the sea.

When dusk became darkness he asked me to turn on the lights, and then he exerted himself to talk. He spoke interestingly of many things: of India and tiger shoots there, and of past frontier wars, in which he appeared to have borne an active part. I listened to him in silence, with a vague, increasing suspicion that we were there for some purpose of his own, and that he was merely talking to pass the time away.

It was half-past ten before he terminated the conversation and gave the word to return. As we took our places in the car I wondered what had passed at Charmingdene while we were away.

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The car raced homeward through the wild and lonely beauty of the night. Nearing the house I observed a faint gleam of light in an upper room, and wondered if Dr. Penhryn was keeping vigil there. But outside the gate there was no sign of his car. As we came closer a mournful cry sounded in my ears—the deep prolonged baying of a dog. A moment later and I saw the great wolfhound Pedro running noiselessly down the gravel path.

"Pedro has been baying at the moon," remarked Colonel Gravenall as he got out of the car.

But there was no moon showing above the distant hills.

Chapter 4

THE FIRST COMING OF THE DRUM

UNTIL THEN I had been no further inside Charmingdene than the kitchen, and I had not seen the face of the girl who drove each night to the headland with her brother in the car. But the moment was at hand when these things were to happen, together with others which were to fill me with dismay. I have my share of common courage, attested (as I hope) by a decoration won in the war, but capacity for the savagery of the battlefield was to be of little use to me here. For the first time in my life I was to be brought face to face with the dread unknown.

The first of these strange events happened some nights after the visit to St. Just. I was in the garage, preparing for the nightly drive. The hour of eight had gone, as I knew from the small watch Colonel Gravenall had lent me when he found I had not one of my own. It was a pleasant night, without wind; very still and clear, with a high, dark sky. It may be because of the stillness that I heard what followed so distinctly in there.

I was busy polishing the lamps at the time, softly whistling to myself. While thus occupied a kind of scuffling sound reached my ears. The next moment I heard a sharp cry coming, as I believed, from the interior of the house. I dropped my polishing leather, and moved towards the door of the garage, looking eagerly across the yard to see what was happening inside, where everything was usually so quiet at that hour.

The house was silent now, and I did not hear the cry again. Upstairs a light flickered across a drawn blind, then disappeared as I looked, leaving the upper windows once more in darkness. I stood there perplexed, wondering if the momentary flash was a signal into the darkness of the moors, and asking myself what I ought to do. Then I heard quick footsteps crossing the yard, and observed a dim figure approaching with a swift step. The next moment I saw Colonel Gravenall at the entrance of the garage.

"Haldham," said he, and he spoke in a panting voice which I had some difficulty to understand, "I want you to fetch Dr. Penhryn at once from St. Bree. That is the hamlet across the moors, lying about two miles along the road beyond the closed gate. Ask him to come immediately, and bring him back with you in the car. Tell him there has been a relapse—a dangerous relapse. Do not lose a moment, but go at once."

He was gone again before I could ask him where Dr. Penhryn dwelt, but I knew I could easily ascertain that at St. Bree. I got out the car, and was soon spinning along the white road in the night. Past the closed gate which shut off the colonel's portion of the road I put on extra speed, and swept down a long hill with a faint light at the end, like a candle twinkling in the darkness of the moors. I knew that was the hamlet of St. Bree.

The light came from the open entrance of The Running Horse, as I saw when I glided into the dark, cobbled street. It burned dimly within, revealing the bar, and some red, rustic faces befogged in tobacco smoke. I pulled up beneath the swinging sign, and jumped down to ask my way to Dr. Penhryn's house.

I went to the closed side window and

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tapped. It was opened by the girl who had given me my first meal in Cornwall, and who had put the note into my hand when I was going away. On this occasion she was wearing a green dress, and her tawny mass of hair was coquettishly tied with ribbons. At first sight she did not appear to recognize me in my motoring cap; then she looked into my face and broadly smiled.

"Why, it's you!" she exclaimed. "Go into the parlour, won't 'ee? There's nobbut there, and he's abed—been drinking to-day." She pointed overhead, as an indication, I suppose, that the ogre of The Running Horse was in his room upstairs, asleep.

"I mustn't stay now, Hespeth," I said. "I am in a hurry. Can you tell me where Dr. Penhryn lives?"

She glanced up at me. In the dim lamplight her fresh and buxom face seemed to whiten a little.

"Is he wanted at Charmingdene again?" she whispered.

I nodded, wondering what she knew about it all. She unfastened the lower half of the side door, and stepped into the passage where I stood. She closed the door behind her before she spoke again.

"Dr. Penhryn's place is yonder up the road—the last house on the hill. It's all by itself, standing back a bit, behind two trees on a lawn."

"Do you think I'll find the doctor at home?"

"Yes," she said with a nod. "You'll find him there, like enow. He never goes out at night—'cept to Charmingdene. He's a quare one, is Doctor Penhryn."

UP THE hill I went until a solitary house appeared like an outline against the darkness of the night. It stood alone and well back from the road, with a faint light gleaming within.

The door was opened by Dr. Penhryn himself. Later I learned the meaning of Hespeth's words. The doctor lived alone with a woman servant who went home at night. He stood now on the step above me, holding a small lamp in his hand, so that the rays slanted downward on my face.

"From Charmingdene?" he said, in instant recognition. "Come in."

He took me into the lighted room on the left. I looked around me with curiosity. The room was large, comfortably furnished, and full of books, which lined the walls on shelves and overflowed in heaps upon the floor. A large volume stood open beneath a reading lamp upon the mahogany table. Here was where Dr. Penhryn read his strange books far into the night.

Dr. Penhryn put down the smaller lamp upon the table and looked at me with his steady, clear eyes. "Well," said he, "what is the matter at Charmingdene?"

There was something in his manner of speaking which impelled instant confidence in his intelligence. Instinctively I realized that there was no contingency in life which would find him unprepared. He struck me as a very remarkable personality, and certainly a most unusual medical man to come across in Cornish wilds.

"Colonel Gravenall sent me to tell you that there has been a relapse—a dangerous relapse," I said; "and to ask you to come over at once. I have the car waiting outside."

He appeared to reflect rapidly.

"Very well," he rejoined. "I will return with you. But you must wait a few minutes until I get ready. I shall not keep you long."

He indicated a chair, and left the room. I did not sit down, but wandered around the bookshelves, looking at the titles of the books. They covered a wide range in the transcendental and metaphysical, forming an uncommon library for a medical man. All kinds of works on the process and oddities of human thought seemed to be assembled there, from the days of black magic to the psychoptherapeutics of the modern analytical school. Some of the latter I recognized: Freud, Bleuler, and Jung; and one or two European scientists on the morbid phenomena of the brain. I took

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down one book in German, because I read that tongue fairly well. But after one hasty glance at it I quickly restored it to its place. It was a study of dementia praecox, and its plates of naked lunatics turned my stomach, quite unused to German scientific treatment of the more repellent disorders of life.

Other shelves appeared to be full of volumes on the influence of suggestion upon the human mind, from the early investigations of Bertrand and James Braid to recent studies of autosuggestion by modern French writers in this line of thought. I was conscious of a sudden interest as I scanned the titles of these works. Some time before, I had heard a lecture in London by a foreign professor who claimed for autosuggestion truly remarkable powers. The name on one of the books recalled the lecture now: the lighted salon, the intent feminine listeners, and the lecturer, dignified and suave, explaining his theory of the subconscious mind.

I took the sober brown volume from its niche in the shelf, and stood there thoughtfully with it in my hand. I wondered what need Dr. Penhryn had for such an unusual collection of books. They formed a valuable library for an alienist or specialist in nervous disease, but were not of much use to a country doctor with a practice among a handful of fishermen and hill-dwellers on the Cornish coast. An alienist . . . a brain doctor. . . . Unconsciously I recalled the note which Hespeth had thrust into my hand at the inn a week before. Was Dr. Penhryn indeed a brain doctor, out of his proper sphere in Harley Street, living, for some eccentric reason, like a recluse in these lonely wilds? That supposition carried the implication that the man I drove at night was actually mad, and that Dr. Penhryn was treating him in that lonely house on the moors. It was a chilling thought.

As I turned it over in my mind, Dr. Penhryn returned to the room, dressed ready to go out, and carrying a small leather case such as medical men use. His eyes glanced towards me as I stood by the shelves, then travelled quickly downwards to the book in my hand. I felt myself flush like one caught in a guilty act.

"I was looking at Nicoli's book," I murmured, hastily restoring the volume to its place. "I hope you don't mind my glancing over it. I heard him lecture once in London."

His luminous eyes seemed to glow and brighten with a sudden interest.

"So you heard Nicoli lecture, and in London, too? Ah, his is a great mind—a very great mind!" He looked at me quickly. "Are you interested in the subject of suggestion, then?"

I shook my head.

"I know very little about it," I replied. "It was curiosity that took me to the lecture—nothing more."

"And what did you think of it?"

"I don't understand much about it," I answered doubtfully, after a pause. "There may be something in it, of course, but the theory seemed rather fantastic, to me."

He regarded me with rather a peculiar smile.

"Hardly that," he said coldly, "though it is very English to speak so of a matter you do not understand. Suggestion is a science of incalculable consequence to humanity. It has added a new province of knowledge to medicine, as every practising physician should understand. Too long have the members of that profession been restricted to the most narrow and conventional views." He broke off hastily, as if recalling our respective positions, and went on in a stiffer voice, "You're an unusual young man for a chauffeur, with a thirst for knowledge at least."

I had an uneasy feeling that he knew more of me than I wanted him to know.

"Come let us go," he said.

Our drive back was a quiet one. My companion sat silent beside me, his eyes fixed upon the darkness ahead. When I pulled up outside Charmingdene, he was out of the car instantly, his case in his hand. Then he said:

"You had better wait here for a while. I may need the car."

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His voice reached me with a sudden disagreeable touch of authority. Next moment he disappeared within the garden gate.

I remained waiting for some time, my eyes fixed on the house. The lower portion seemed in darkness, but a light gleamed above. After a while it disappeared; then I saw a strengthening glow above the fanlight of the front door, as though someone was carrying a lamp downstairs.

The door opened, and light streamed across the gravel. A feminine figure appeared on the steps, dark against the lighted passage. Silhouetted against the brightness I saw the face distinctly from the car. With a start I recognized the girl I had seen in London at the Pageham hotel.

Eagerly I watched her as she walked down the steps to the gravel path. I was conscious that she was coming through the garden to where I sat in the car. I heard the garden gate open, and saw her figure beside me in the darkness of the road. Her voice floated up to me clearly as she spoke.

"The car will not be required again to-night. But Colonel Gravenall wishes you to drive him to Penzance in the morning for the ten o'clock express."

She stood for a moment in the roadside, her face uplifted to mine in the car. But the shock of seeing her there robbed me of speech to reply. On the lonely Cornish road, in the darkness, our eyes met. The next moment she turned away, and the garden gate swung to.

■ I NOW come to the part of my story most incredible of belief, and I will set down the sequence of events as they occurred. The first was the departure of Colonel Gravenall the next morning for London, where he intended to remain some days. So much I gathered from him in the course of the drive to the station, though he did not confide the object of his visit to town. When we reached Penzance he told me not to take the car back to Charmingdene, but to leave it at a place in the town for repairs while he was away. With these instructions he moved towards the station barrier, and a moment later the train bore him out of sight.

I drove the car to the address he had given. The repairs seemed unnecessary to me, but that, I reflected, was no business of mine. At the same time it seemed to me that there was some significant relation between the drives to the promontory and Colonel Gravenall's presence at Charmingdene. The nightly routine had been broken when I took him to St. Just, and now the drives could not be resumed until he returned.

Walking home across the moors, I once more tried to puzzle things out, but the only fact that emerged from the chaos of my mind was the knowledge that the girl who accompanied the shrouded figure to the cliffs was identical with the girl I had twice seen in London before I left. That was not so very wonderful, after all, looked at in one way. She was my employer's niece—her brother's companion and devoted nurse, he had said; so it was quite natural that she should be in London and at her uncle's solicitor's on his behalf.

The thought of this girl near me and evidently in need of help kept my mind busy for the remainder of my walk home. I told myself I would not fail her if I got the chance. Nearing Charmingdene, I scanned the place eagerly, in the hope that she might be about. But the house was silent and deserted, looking drearier to my eyes than it had ever seemed before. And I did not catch a glimpse of her during the remainder of the day.

Time went on. The colonel's absence made little difference to that strange household, except that my own occupation was gone. I spent long hours taking solitary walks upon the moors. One change at Charmingdene I did notice. Dr. Penhryn's visits to the house were more frequent than before. This suggested one of two things to my mind—either the patient's mysterious illness was growing worse, or Colonel Gravenall had asked the doctor to keep a close eye on things while he was away. My own opin-

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ion oscillated from one view to the other, and then swung backward again. But at all events Dr. Penhryn came to Charmingdene on the day Colonel Gravenall went to London, and after that he paid long visits every day. Sometimes he came in the afternoon, and when that happened he prolonged his stay until late at night. In my room, sitting reading, I used to wonder what kept him so long in the silent house.

One night I walked up and down the road, determined to see how long his small car remained standing outside. The hours passed drearily as I lounged there smoking, and still the doctor did not come. It must have been near midnight when the front door opened at last and two figures appeared on the threshold—those of Dr. Penhryn and the girl. From the shadows I watched them. Their faces were clear to me, like two people cast on a lighted screen—the girl looked pale, and her dark eyes were raised beseechingly to his.

She was talking earnestly, her fingers clasping his arm, which is a woman's way with a doctor or a priest. And Dr. Penhryn appeared to be endeavouring to reassure her. I saw him pat her hand—doubtless in a professional way—and reply in what was evidently a consoling strain. When he had concluded what he was saying he turned away, walking rapidly down the garden path, while she kept the door open to guide him, a wistful girlish figure framed in streaming light.

Dr. Penhryn passed through the gate, and the door closed. From the safe shelter of the hedge I observed that he stood for a moment by the roadside with his head sunk forward, as if in deep thought. Then he stepped into his car and drove off.

■ THE NEXT day I observed his little car jogging down the road at an early hour. He stopped outside the gate as usual, but instead of going straight up the gravel path to the house he made his way across the garden to where I worked, spade in hand, endeavouring to while the morning hours away. He nodded a greeting, and commented on my occupation with a smile.

"I'm afraid you'll find gardening thankless work here," he said. "Geology would be a more profitable pursuit. Cornish winds are very rough on tender plants."

"That's true," I said straightening my back and looking at him with a smile. "No growing thing appears to do well in this part of the world except the evergreens."

"Ah, you say that because you do not know Cornwall very well," he rejoined. "The best things grow wild, in the sheltered nooks of the rocks and moors. The air is soft enough, if you get away from the wind. I've found maidenhair fern growing in Lamorna Cove, and pale butterwort and that delicate blue creeper *Wahlenbergia hederacea* in profusion in crevices of the hills. I have also seen the rare *Jungermannia calyptrifolia* there. But perhaps you do not care for botany?"

"I know nothing of it," I said. "But so far I've seen very few flowers upon the moors."

"They grow there, but in sheltered and secluded haunts," he rejoined.

"Folk sometimes get strange fancies down here," he went on, casting another glance at me as he spoke. "And that reminds me of something I wish to ask you. Have you heard any unusual noise about this place at night?"

"What kind of noise?" I asked.

"A muffled, hollow sound, like the distant roll of a kettledrum. At least, that is how it is described to me."

I shook my head.

"Ah, well, perhaps it is merely the fancy of a nervous invalid, after all," he remarked tolerantly. "The rocks, the wind, and the sea all have their voices at times, and rather disconcerting voices too! On a stormy night one can hear the beat of the surf for miles inland. This house is not very far from the Hooting Cairn, and you can hear its horrible moan when the wind is blowing from that way. Still, if you do hear anything, tell me."

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"Certainly," I said.

He thanked me with a smile and a nod, and went on his way towards the house.

I thought no more of this conversation just then, but I had occasion to recall his request no later than that night. I had gone to my room rather early, tired after a long afternoon's tramp across the moors, but in spite of my fatigue I could not sleep, and I tried reading a book left by my predecessor.

Suddenly the stillness of my room was broken by a faint and persistent interruption from the darkness outside.

At the outset I could make nothing of the sound. It reached me in a kind of steady rhythm—a faint, continuous tapping, like the beating of a stick on wood, though coming with a more veiled and deadened sound. I wondered if it could possibly proceed from some natural cause, such as the murmur of the sea or the wind playing through the loose shells of The Oysters near the house. But the night was without wind, and the sea five miles away.

The tapping grew louder and deeper, coming, it seemed to me, from the moors to the north of the house. I listened intently, and recognized the sound. I heard it with an involuntary surprise too, and Dr. Penhryn's words that morning rushed back to me. For the veiled and muffled tapping was the distant roll of a small drum, coming through the darkness of the moors towards the house.

From the window-opening above the bed I looked out. It is said that strange things are to be seen in Cornwall after nightfall—by the seeing eye. Perhaps the gift of such vision has been denied me. At least I could see no sign of a phantom drummer patrolling the darkened moors: nothing beyond the shadowy outline of the house, and in the distance the toppling pillars of The Oysters' giant shells.

Yet the sound of the drum continued to draw swiftly near, floating sullenly upward to me out of the dark, with a kind of subdued menace in its note, as if its beat carried a warning for whomever it was intended to reach. With eyes searching the blackness of the night I leaned farther forth. By some means my foot caught one of the candlesticks, and sent it clattering to the floor. In that instant the sound of the drum ceased.

I STAYED by the window for some time, but the drum did not sound again. Half an hour or more passed, and the silence remained profound. With the memory of that faint tattoo still haunting my ears, I scanned the dim landscape intently, but in vain. Nothing sounded now; no shape stirred upon the undulating outline of the moors.

My patience grew weary at length. I left the window and put out the candle—the other had expired when it fell. I was about to get into bed when the stillness of the night was broken by another sound. Not the tapping of a drum, but a different kind of noise—a stealthy scrape, like the cautious opening of a window or a door, and coming from the direction of the house.

In the dark I went back to the window, and looked towards the outline of the house. It was shuttered and silent, with no light or sign of life. But as I stared out I saw something moving in the gloom underneath. A moment later a man's figure passed beneath my window like a phantom and rapidly mounted the hill.

It was out of my sight in an instant. I watched a while longer, but did not see it again. It had vanished with the fleetness of a vision; like a ghost newly risen from a grave. I relit my candle rather shakily, but my book did not tempt me now. I had heard and seen stranger things than its covers held in store. Full of troubled thoughts I sought my bed, and after a while fell asleep.

When I awoke the morning sun was streaming into my room with a bright clear light. But I arose with uneasy mind, preoccupied with the night's events, though little guessing that the day was to hold still greater surprises in store. An extemporized bath I had rigged up for myself in the garage below put me in better trim, and inclined me to rally myself on my overnight fears. Shaved and

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bathed, and in a jauntier moor, I went across to the kitchen for breakfast.

The old woman was there, busy with her eternal stirring at the hob. She placed a dish of bacon and eggs on the table before me, but, contrary to her usual custom, she did not turn back to the fire. Waiting and mute she stood, until I looked up at her. To my astonishment I saw that her blinking eyes were fixed upon me with a kind of troubled stare, like the dumb wistfulness of an animal seeking compassion or help.

"What is it, Mrs. Truedick?" I shouted in her ear.

"I be afeered," she muttered, in a whimpering tone.

"Why, what is the matter? Tell me of what you are afraid." I spoke as gently as I could, so as not to alarm her, though her words sent the blood leaping in my veins.

"They be gone!" she said.

I doubted whether I had heard aright.

"Who have gone?" I asked her, stupidly staring in my turn.

"They." She nodded an unkempt head towards the ceiling as she spoke. "There's nobbut but mysel' in the hoose. When I got up this marnin' they be gone. Ye can look for yersel' and see."

She turned her back to me, and threw open the inner door which shut off the kitchen from the remainder of the house. In silence I walked along the passage and looked into the rooms downstairs. They were empty, as she had said. I was about to proceed to the upper rooms, but some feeling of delicacy restrained me, and I paused at the bottom of the stairs. After all, I was merely the chauffeur, with no right to pry into the bedrooms of the household, even if the inmates had gone away. So I went back into the kitchen instead, to try and glean something further from Mrs. Truedick.

But this I found it impossible to do.

I decided to go to St. Bree and see Dr. Penhryn. So I set off along the road, in case I encountered him coming to Charmingdene. But I might have spared myself the long, dusty walk. For the doctor was not at home. When I went through the garden gate it was to find a woman servant scrubbing the steps, and she told me that the doctor had gone to Penzance early that morning, and was not expected back until late in the afternoon.

There was nothing to do but return to Charmingdene. As I walked I meditated upon this last strange occurrence there, and came to the conclusion that the inmates of the household could not be very far away. Apparently they had left during the night, without luggage, for they had no means of taking it. A puzzling and amazing business altogether!

I ate my dinner, that night, in silence, and then went out on the moors.

I walked up the hill which led past my window, in the direction taken by that unknown figure on the previous night. Around me stretched the moors in mournful silence, running to the horizon without a sign of life. Overhead a dark sky hung listlessly, with clouds sailing low. After some hesitation I set my footsteps in a diagonal path across the heather, in the direction of where I believed lay the sea. It was as though my thoughts unconsciously turned for the key to the mystery in the sombre setting of my nightly drive. I could see nothing but moors around me, but I knew the sea was somewhere in that direction, a few miles away. And so I set out to reach it. Above me a gull flew crying, back to its element again. My feet seemed to follow in its wake.

In the deep, sweet solitude of the heather I walked on for an hour or more. Then I topped a little hill, and looked around me to discern the way. Moors—nothing but moors still! They stretched before me, like the sea, undulating in great, sullen waves. It was an uninviting outlook, monotonous and grim; but as I looked into the distance I made out a human form. It was a girl, walking rapidly across the heather in the direction of where I stood.

I knew her instantly, even at that distance away. Near me rose a rock in the heather, a grey and weatherbeaten stone. I leaned against it, waiting for her.

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She came on quickly, with unseeing eyes, her feet falling on the heather without sound. Not until she was close to the rock did she lift her eyes and behold me there. She seemed struck with a strange amazement at the sight of me, waiting in the middle of the moors. The next instant she quickened her step as if to pass me by.

I stepped from the rock and stood in her way.

"I have been looking for you," I said. "I am lucky to find you."

Her large dark eyes rested full on my face with a look I did not understand. Then she spoke:

"For what reason have you been looking for me?"

The coldness of her voice choked back half-uttered words in my throat. Who was I to counsel her or to offer her my help? What was I, after all, but the chauffeur of Charmingdene, meeting a lady of his master's household in the course of an afternoon's walk?

"I—that is, the housekeeper seems upset. She became alarmed when she found you were not at home, so I—"

She did not even allow me to finish, but broke in on my confused speech with a few quick words:

"I have only been out for a walk. There seems to me no reason why Mrs. Truedick should have become alarmed, or that you should have come out in search of me."

She said this hurriedly, with another strange glance. Then she passed by me quickly, leaving me to stare after her from the shadow of the rock.

IN THE midst of the heather I stood and watched her until she became a mere speck in the purple distance of the moors. Then a bend of the hills enfolded her, and she vanished from my sight.

Her presence in that spot was a mystery to me. At first I could not conjecture where she had been; then it came to me, unconsciously, that she had walked across from the sea. If so, what had taken her there?

The only chance of finding that out was to go there myself and see. I had set out to reach the spot, and had an additional motive now. The afternoon was waning, but there were some hours of daylight left—sufficient for my purpose, as I supposed. I had already come some distance from Charmingdene, so the sea could not be very far away. A hill rose a little distance from me on my right hand, and I ascended it to ascertain my way.

From the summit of the hill I discerned the bright face of the sea, and had a glimpse of the little promontory in its narrow bay edged with black, broken cliffs. And from the hill-top the white road unwound itself to view, twisting and turning and doubling back across the moors like a road that had lost its way. There seemed a good twenty miles of it and more before it finally came to the sea. But across the moors the glittering waters appeared but a short distance away—a mere stone's throw for any giant of The Oysters, had one sought to hurl a ringed kissing stone from the heights. Two miles or so I made it to that wonderful shimmering sea. I could see it, clear and beautiful—the tall crags and the circling birds—and I could even hear the distant murmur of the surf. I took my bearings carefully and descended from the hill.

Along my new course I went quickly, expecting soon to set eyes upon the sea again. But that hope was not realized so quickly as I could have wished. After walking for the better part of an hour I found myself upon a lonely stretch of moorland, still out of sight and hearing of my goal. I was rather amused at having wandered off the track at first, but amusement faded as I walked on through an unchanging monotone of hills. For there was no hill near enough to tell me my way—only the flat expanse of heather and the distant heights. Even the white road with its serpentine twinings had vanished from view. I walked on for some time longer before the truth came at me in a clap. I was hopelessly lost on the wide Cornish moors.

I paused to look around me and take

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my bearings again; but that, indeed, was of little use. I had wandered into an unknown part of the moors, eerie and indescribably wild. The greyness of age was about me, the heather, and great barrows of stones. As I took in these things doubtfully a great drop of rain splashed on my face. Looking up, I saw that dark clouds filled the sky. Dusk had come at a stride, and a dreary wind was blowing across the moors with a queer, moaning sound.

It was a pitiless spot in which to be overtaken by a storm. There was no shelter for miles, only the open moors and a low and rain-clouded sky. I had to make up my mind quickly what to do. Straight ahead the moors seemed to fall a little away. I took that direction, hoping it would bring me to the sea and the welcome shelter of the cliffs.

I walked on swiftly for some time. Then darkness fell about me like a curtain, and with darkness came the loosing of the storm.

The storm was a wonderful spectacle, but it was one I could well have spared. The rain thundered in torrents, and great flashes of lightning savagely illumined the soaking desolation of the moors. I was wet to the skin in no time, but kept doggedly on. For that matter, there was nothing else to do. It was worse than useless to stand still.

After a time of wretched discomfort the worst of the storm passed away. The rain thinned to a drizzle, scorched by white flashes of flame. Apart from the fitful lightning, the night was one of the blackest kind. I could not, in the homely phrase, see an inch before my nose. On I stumbled in impenetrable gloom, through the persistent chilling rain, with no sense of direction or the faintest notion where my wanderings were to end. It was a most wretched plight to be in, and drearily I regretted the impulse which had sent me seeking into other people's business on unknown Cornish moors. Drenched and cold and with chattering teeth I went on, tottering through that black-veiled night.

And then, most unexpectedly, I heard the sorrowful sound of the sea—a quiet lapping on a rock quite close, but far below, as though some friendly wave had reared itself to fling a warning in my ear.

"Look out!" it seemed to say. "Take care!"

I stood quite still, not daring to move another step. The rain had practically ceased, but that awful night wrapped me in darkness which was like a thick wet cloud. Distinctly I could hear the water lapping on the rocks beneath, but I could not guess in which direction lay the cliffs, nor tell which way to turn.

Fortunately that was the moment chosen by the electric powers above to send another sheet of white flame flickering across the dark vault of the sky. I do not know if lightning has ever been blessed before, but I praised its name just then; for it showed me the brink of the cliffs, not three feet distant from where I stood, dropping down coldly into the gloom, and beneath me a black spit of rock running out into the sullen waters of the bay.

Here was the end of my journey with a vengeance! The uncanny guidance of chance had directed my footsteps to the spot I had set out to reach. This was the scene of my nightly drives, though dangerously beyond the point where I waited with the car. As the lightning forked fitfully I discerned the place where the road ended, with the finger-post a little higher up, pointing a crooked derisive arm towards me on the headland's ghastly brink. Between the finger-post and the cliffs lay an area desolate and waste, dipping sharply from where I stood. In this space was a singular arrangement of rocks, grotesque and misshapen crags, interspersed with ugly splits and chasms in the surface of the ground. And as my eye fell on this scene I caught sight of a building farther away.

It was a large hut with a corrugated iron roof, built against a great granite rock; a forsaken and desolate edifice cowering in a stony hollow about two hundred yards away. But at least it was some kind of shelter, and offered me pro-

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tection from the inclemency of the night.

So much I saw clearly, and it was well that I did, for the lightning died out of the sky and the night was veiled in blackness again. But I had marked the position of the place carefully, and set out swiftly for where it stood. I must confess my heart quaked at the prospect of falling headlong into one of those horrible holes which seamed the rocky face of the ground, but that was a risk I had to take. Again luck was with me, and led me safely down. The next moment from the gloom loomed the outline of the house and the thick, black shape of the rock.

I found the door, and rapped on the shrunken panel before I ventured in, though I was certain the place was deserted and I did not expect a reply. None was forthcoming. My knock reverberated hollowly on the old oaken door. After waiting a moment longer I felt for the door handle. There was an iron catch which gave to my touch. The door swung open, and I stepped inside.

In the stifling darkness I fumbled in my wet pockets for my metal match-box. I had learned the value of it during the war, and I was grateful for it now. But the head of the first match I struck off on the damp box. The second match spluttered and went out. The third burned long enough to show me a beamed and empty interior, with some mildewed oil-skins hanging on the farther wall. I tried again. The next glimmer of the light revealed a fireplace in a corner, and, to my joy, an old candlestick standing on the lintel of the fireplace. Empty? I squandered two more valuable matches in my haste to settle that important point. My relief was perhaps excessive when I discovered about half an inch of candle lurking in the socket—a residue of yellow tallow, hard and grimed with age.

A bare half inch of candle is not much, but it was treasure-trove to me just then. Unfortunately, it took half of my remaining matches before I could get it to burn, and then it gave but a flickering flame.

However, it was something, and by its means I was able to look about the shelter I had found. And the first thing I noticed was that the rock against which the place had been built formed the chimney, and, indeed, the whole of one side of the house. Alongside of this rude chimney-place was an open door, leading, apparently, into a dark recess.

Towards this recess I walked, with the light in my hand. Then I swiftly recoiled, looking down.

Chapter 5

THE VALLEY OF GHOSTS

THE DOOR opened upon a deep, square pit, shored with massive timber, and going straight down into the earth. In the shadowy depths I could hear the sound of water dropping with a splash, as if into some hidden well. Uneasily I stood listening by that black hole near the door, and then I understood.

My refuge was the frame-house round the mine-shaft of the old tin-mine at Point St. Bree, and the water I had heard was gurgling in the shaft and the abandoned underground workings, which, according to Colonel Gravenall, extended beneath the sea. I understood now the meaning of those seamed and fissured holes I had seen in the surface of the ground outside. They were abandoned workings also, probably of a still older date—"coffins" as the Cornish tin-miners called them in former days. After another shuddering glance into the recesses of the pit I attempted to close the door; but it was stuck and would not move. Holding my frail light carefully, I went back into the middle of the room.

The candle cast a meagre flame about the deserted place. In the great rock by the fireplace a kind of rough staircase had been cut, leading to an upper floor above. I wondered wearily if it led to some better place of rest than the damp earthen floor around the edge of the black pit in which the water dripped. Imagination and tired nerves recoiled from that room as a sleeping-place.

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Screening my ebbing candle with careful hand, I made my way up the narrow rock-hewn stairs.

At the top was a swing door. It opened on a meagre, empty room, which had been used as a sleeping apartment at some former time, for it had a wooden bedframe affixed to the farther wall. A piece of coarse sacking lay in it, which I was glad to see, for by now I was shivering violently in my wet and soddened clothes. Except for this the room was bare, with one small boarded window high up in the wall.

In the ceiling overhead was a small trapdoor, leading to an attic above.

These things I observed in a brief survey, and then my scrap of candle expired. I felt for my matches, but my heart sank to find them gone. I must have left them on the chimney lintel underneath when persuading the wretched bit of candle to burn. To go downstairs in search of them without a light was to run the risk of falling headlong into the pit. And a few matches without candle were of little use. So I decided to stay where I was and get through the night as best I could.

In the darkness I felt my way with outstretched hands to the wooden bed-place, and, taking off my sopping outer garments, made shift to pull the sacking over myself for a little warmth. As I did so the rain came down with violence again, beating on the iron roof overhead with hideous uproar. At least I was sheltered from that.

I crouched down, not expecting to sleep. For some time the sound of rain and sea kept me awake, then I passed into a troubled sleep and a region of dreams, horrid beyond belief. I scoured dark moors in storms, scaled cliffs of dizzy heights, and fell into bottomless pits. At length these nightmares ceased, and deep profound slumber took their place.

I must have slept heavily for some hours at least. Then I awoke with a feverish thirst and perspiring frame, to find myself sitting up in the bed-place, staring with widened eyes into the darkness which surrounded me. I was wide awake, with all my senses alert. Consciousness had come back at a bound, just as if I had been aroused by the shake of some invisible hand. And with consciousness had come fear—a creeping and soul-shaking fear such as I had never experienced before, and hope never to feel again. It was sheer terror which turned me cold and sick, and I knew that it sprang from the presence of some other being in that place.

How that knowledge came to me I cannot say, but I was as certain of it as of my own existence just then. And more than that—some uncanny instinct, some inward sentinel of the spirit which watches while we sleep told me that this other visitant was in the attic overhead.

Again I cannot say how I knew this, but some volition which did not seem my own caused my eyes to seek the ceiling above me, searching in the gloom for the trap-door. And presently I discerned it dimly, a small dark square right over my head. Small and dark. Dark . . . like a hole. That thought made the blood course tumultuously through my veins. The trap-door was shut when I had seen it by the light of the candle some hours before. Was it open now? Were unseen eyes staring down from the attic, trying to see below, while my own eyes were striving to pierce the darkness above? I cast another stealthy glance upward, listening intently in the gloom. As I did so I heard the faintest shuffling sound overheard, and the dark patch I had seen above seemed to disappear.

Terror touched my soul within me like a flame. Who—or what—had closed the trap-door? Unreasoning panic turned tremulously to the thought of ghosts and nameless things unseen. My eyes seemed dragged upward again to that trap-door, in the expectation of some sinister and appalling sight. Nothing. No, there was nothing there. But I knew that something lurked and watched behind the flimsy veiling of the door.

■ IN THE profound silence I turned my head and looked about the little room. By degrees I made out the dim contour

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of the walls, and the small and slatted window higher up. It seemed to me that there was a faint greyness between the chinks, and I wondered if it heralded the approach of dawn. My fears waned a little in that hope. With the help of daylight I would be able to see this through. But I could not struggle with those nameless fears up there.

I stumbled from the bed-place and made towards the stairs. Down the rocky steps I went cautiously in the dark, and, keeping as far as possible from the pit, made for the outer door. Outside of it I stood, and listened, waiting for the dawn. The wind sighed about the dark, deserted place, and within the water dripped solemnly in the hidden well. But from upstairs there came no sound.

The faint dawn came at last in a chill grey light, revealing hazily the cliffs and sea, then making visible the distorted rocks which lay about the place. It grew clearer, and I could see the seams and gashes in the earth—the "coffins" of the mine which had now passed away. And when daylight became distinct I entered the house again and went upstairs.

My eyes sought the ceiling instinctively. In the dim morning light the trap-door looked to be almost closed, though not quite. Glancing up at it, I called out:

"Is anyone there?"

There was no reply. I waited a moment, then went nearer the bed-place to examine the ceiling at closer range. As I gazed up at the trap-door it seemed to me that it was now completely closed. Something of my former nervousness returned. This was a mysterious and disconcerting thing. Amazed, I stepped back a little, doubting the evidence of my eyesight, and wondering if my other senses had been astray as well. And as I stood there, looking up at the ceiling and trying to decide what course to pursue, I was petrified at hearing a strange sound coming from the attic above. It was something between a cry and a sob, and was followed by silence again.

I was startled, but my courage did not fail me now. I stepped back to the bed-place.

"Who is there?" I called once more. Again there was no reply. I waited, but the silence remained unbroken. Yet it was certain some being was hidden above—some mysterious identity that did not wish to be seen. I hesitated, trying to think what best to do. The trap-door could only be reached by steps, and there were no steps there. I was determined now to find out what was in the attic, but I did not in the least know how it was to be done. The bed-place was immovable, and the trap-door was six feet above my head.

After some consideration it occurred to me that if I went quietly away whoever was concealed in the attic might believe the coast to be clear and ultimately come forth. With another glance at the closed aperture I acted on the prompting of this idea, and went quickly downstairs. Outside I stood and waited, keeping a watchful eye on the open door. An hour passed, and more. The sun topped the eastern hills, gilding the grey waters of the bay and bringing some grateful warmth to my chilled frame. I was wondering how much longer I should have to wait there when my eye fell upon the figure of a girl stepping cautiously across the rocks to that deserted place with a basket in her hand.

I recognized her on the instant, but she was too occupied in picking her way to see me until she was quite close. When her glance did light on me she recoiled, and I saw in her face both anger and fear. "It is you!" she cried, as our eyes met. "Oh, what has brought you here?"

Distress seemed uppermost with her, and that remembered fear. After the first glance she avoided looking at me, but stood there with downcast eyes. Hurriedly I told her of my experiences in the storm after I had encountered her overnight. She appeared greatly troubled, but I did not flatter myself it was on my account. Involuntarily her eyes went past me towards the door of the hut.

"And you have been in there all night?" she murmured in an unhappy voice. "Why, oh, why did you come to this place?"

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"I have told you it was quite by accident," I replied, speaking a little bitterly now. "At all events, I did not pass a very comfortable night. If I had known what I know now I should have preferred to take my chance out upon the open moors."

■ SHE RAISED quick, frightened eyes to me.

"What do you mean by that?" she said in a whisper. "What have you seen—in there?"

"Nothing whatever," I said, "but I heard something, which comes to the same thing. And from your presence here this morning I suppose it is your brother who is in the attic upstairs."

She gave me another upward glance. This time it was an imploring one, and I knew that I had guessed aright. I hesitated before I spoke again.

"I wish you would tell me what your trouble is," I said. "Believe me, I would help you if I could. You can safely trust me and rely upon me in every way."

I thought she stiffened a little at that, and the colour rose in her cheeks.

"Thank you; but there is nothing you can do," she answered. "If I do not accept your offer, it is because there is no way in which I could accept your help. Perhaps I would do so if I could."

"Your brother was an officer in the war, was he not?" I asked. "Well, could you not tell him that a brother-officer wants to help him, if he can? With what regiment did your brother serve at the front?"

She told me, and I smiled.

"Why, this is a strange thing," I replied. "Wasn't that the regiment commanded by Sir Herbert Asherton?"

"I believe so," she replied. "I have heard my brother mention Colonel Asherton's name. But why do you ask?"

"Because he is a kinsman of mine," I rejoined; "he is married to my mother's sister, in fact, and comes from my own county of Berkshire. Rather strange, isn't it? I wanted to help you in any case, but this makes it easier now. You see, it forms a kind of link between your brother and myself. You really must let me be of some assistance. Will you not at least talk it over with your brother, while I wait here? Explain to him what I have told you, and how anxious I am to be of some use. And tell him also that his trouble, whatever it is, will be respected by me."

She lifted her face to me with a nod and a look.

"Thank you," she said quite simply. "I will go to him and tell him what you say."

She left me and went to the house. I waited where I was, looking out on the sea. She was absent for some time. Once I thought I heard a movement in the place, but I refrained from looking around. Then I heard her footsteps approach. She came towards me with a little smile—the first I had seen on her face.

"He says he will see you," she said. "He is waiting for you inside. Come with me and I will take you to him."

With these words she turned away quickly, and I followed her back among the rocks. Through the room of the shaft she passed, and mounted the stairway in the corner by the chimney-place. She turned into the room where I had spent the night, and within I saw her brother seated on the bed. By his side was a small ladder. The girl went to him.

"Edward," she said, "here is Mr. Haldham."

In the dim light of the room he rose from the bed-place and came forward with extended hand.

"It is very kind of you to come," he said.

My face must have showed my amazement as he uttered these words. Heaven knows what I had expected to see—some sort of an invalid, I suppose; therefore the shock was greater when my eyes fell upon this tall and handsome young man, well set up, with almost an athletic frame. He was very like his sister, though he had none of her wistful charm. But there was a more important difference between them than that; for while her face showed strength of character even in her distress, his revealed weakness only—and worse.

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He had the twitching lips and shaking hands of a man whose nervous system had given way, and after one quick, furtive glance his eyes avoided mine and kept peering anxiously towards the door. Obviously he was in a most painful state of tension, and started nervously at the least movement or sound. Altogether, he made upon me the disagreeable impression of a man not quite right in his mind. Yet his words were clearly spoken, and withal courteous as well, as he again thanked me for what he called my kindness in proffering my help. In return I again offered my service, and promised to treat as confidential anything he chose to say.

"I think you had better tell Mr. Haldham everything, Edward," his sister said.

He stared towards her vacantly. "Yes, Eleanor; it will be best," he muttered almost to himself.

I said I was ready to listen, but his sister interposed.

"We are going to have breakfast first," she said solicitously. "I am sure you both need some food."

She unpacked the basket she had brought and spread the contents on the wooden shelf of the bed—some slices of ham, bread and butter, and a large flask of hot tea. The food, and especially the tea, made a new man of me. When the meal was finished I lit a cigarette and took my seat on the bed-place, where I waited for the young man to begin. His sister had found an old chair in some part of the hut, and she seated herself near me now. But her brother kept striding restlessly up and down, his eyes forever seeking the narrow opening at the head of the stairs. At length with what seemed an effort he came to where we sat, and faced me quickly with a look of misery in his eyes.

"I thought it was all nonsense," he began in an abrupt voice. "But that was at the first. Now I do not know whether I am mad or whether it is the dreadful truth."

WITH THIS strange preamble and another strained glance in the direction of the door, he addressed himself to the revelation of the mystery which had puzzled me since coming to Charmingdene.

His next words surprised me.

"You have heard of Herbert Musard?" he asked.

I nodded. Who, indeed, had not heard of him? The explorer's name was famous throughout the world, though the man himself was dead. He had headed a scientific exploration into the depths of South America two years before to investigate strange rumours of a prehistoric reptile of great size supposed to be dwelling on the shores of a very large inland lake.

Such was the explanation of the expedition put forward in the columns of the sensational press, but from more reputable sources it was stated that the expedition was an ethnological and geographical one, aiming at the exploration of an almost unknown tract of land, and seeking to discover the existence of a tribe of dwarf Indians, reputed to be smaller in stature than the bushmen of West Africa or the pygmies of the Upper Congo wilds.

But whatever the object, it was not achieved. The expedition went out, but never returned. It vanished somewhere in the wilds of Peru and was never heard of again.

My companion sat silent for a while, then went on:

"I was a member of Musard's last expedition through Peru."

I was more than startled now, and my face showed my surprise. He went on gloomily:

"It was supposed that every member of the expedition was lost—Musard and his companions, guides and all."

"So I understood from the newspapers," I hesitatingly said. "That was the theory, at least. Nothing was ever definitely known."

"Well, the newspapers were wrong for once. One member of that expedition returned. It was I."

He sighed a little wearily, and lapsed into silence again. I waited for him to continue, wondering why he had not

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made his return known and relieved the anxiety of the civilized world about the expedition at the time.

"I met Musard at the house of a mutual friend in Hampshire shortly before he went out," he continued, after a pause. "That would be about a year or so after the cessation of the war.

"We had many talks together, Musard and I, generally in the smoking-room of the country house where we were guests, after the others had gone to bed. He was a most fascinating companion, besides being a born leader of men—as I was afterwards to see.

"I think his object was to take me out of myself, and help me out of the morass of introspection into which I had fallen after the war—a hopeless frame of mind in which life appeared to me as an absolutely futile thing.

"It was the thought that some remnant of the ancient worshippers of the sun still survived near the shores of the great inland lake which made him anxious to start on his expedition. He had heard the story from some Indians on the Amazon years before. They dwelt, this forgotten people, on the far side of some tremendous mountains—a range of snowy peaks which had never yet been crossed.

"'I am going to cross that rage of mountains and find out whether this story is true,' said Musard, when he had told me this. 'It is one of the last undiscovered spots on the surface of the globe.'

"I was fired by his enthusiasm, so it was arranged. The expedition left England the following week, and I had joined it.

"Ah, the glamour and romance of that voyage across the sea to an unknown shore! It was to bring me to horror and suffering, but I feel its fascination still. From Peru we commenced our inland journey at Camana, though the actual starting-point was Chuquibama. Musard intended to cross the desert from there, making a southerly course for the range of great mountains beyond which lay the secrets he hoped to find. And in that wild frontier town men warned our leader that it meant calamity to go onward.

"They urged him to give up the expedition. To attempt to cross the mountains was to court death, they said. They told us stories of prospectors and adventurers who had gone forth into the desert and never returned. And they told us also of the Indian legend—how if any human beings ever succeeded in crossing the desert and ascending the mountains, from the top of them they would look down into the dreadful Valley of Death.

"Of course these stories had no effect upon Musard, though he soon discovered that the Indians implicitly believed in the last legend when he tried to engage guides to take the expedition to the foot of the mountains. Not an Indian in Chuquibama could be persuaded to go. They were all too much in fear of 'The Valley of Ghosts,' which was the native name for this dim, unknown region beyond the mountain-tops. But Musard was used to overcoming obstacles of this kind.

"By dint of bribes, threats, and persuasion he induced two old Indians whom he found in a neighboring village to act as our guides. They were withered and toothless and bent, and so old that they probably thought it worth their while to take the chance of death for the sake of extra pay.

"So we started on a Sunday at midnight. I can see it now—that loaded pack-train of a dozen mules, a handful of white men on foot, with Musard and the two ancient Indians leading the way. We left the narrow stony street of that wretched town, and the dark wildness of the interminable and trackless desert open before us.

"WE WERE five days in the desert without coming nearer to the great mountains we had left England to climb. Or it seemed so to me. They looked down at us like shadows from the vast distance: gigantic, mocking, illusive, perpetually retreating—will-o'-the wisps. But we kept on doggedly towards their ironically beckoning shapes. On and on we went, until we found ourselves encompassed in a region of vast sand-dunes, full of

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contorted grey stones which looked to me like tombs.

"It was in this weird spot that I observed the first symptoms of uneasiness in our two aged guides. They had drawn a little apart, by one of the uncouth stones, which they were regarding very earnestly. I went closer without them noticing, and saw that they were staring at a crude carving of a snake upon the stone—a snake with its head lifted as if about to strike. This picture appeared to alarm them very much. They talked in earnest whispers for a while, looking towards Musard now and then. And that night they disappeared.

"Musard determined to go on without them. The last few days of our weary pilgrimage had brought us within measurable distance of our goal. We could actually see the gaunt, wild outlines of those great, illusive shapes. They were a towering range, with three dominant snowy peaks of skyey height, with a seamed and naked rocked saddle between two of them which appeared to afford the only possible passage of ascent. Examining the saddle through his binoculars, Musard thought he discerned a practicable route up the rocky slope. It was a dizzy climb, and in places dangerous with ice and snow; but there was no other way. Still, it seemed possible and, so far as we could see, it was climbable above the snowline, and crossed the ranges at what, at that distance, seemed the lowest point.

"Two days later we reached the foot of the mountains. At daybreak the following morning we commenced the ascent.

"I will say little of the difficulties of that climb, for it has nothing to do with my story. By nightfall we were not halfway to the ridge, and had to camp. The ascent was very arduous, through crumbling scoriae and black, volcanic sand; but actual hardship did not beset us until the following day, after we passed into the region of snow. At the snowline we had to leave the mules behind. We made a cache for some of our things, and, carrying the remainder, went on afoot.

"The long, rocky ridge which led to the summit was very steep, and dangerous and slippery with ice. There were hazardous slopes up which we had to cut our way. We suffered greatly from the cold and *soroche,* and were compelled to spend the second night on a narrow and overhanging ledge two thousand feet from the top.

"We reached it next day. I shall never forget my sensations as we stood in silence on the summit of this great fortress of Nature, put there, it may be, in a profound determination to guard the last of her secrets from the inquisitive spirit of man. Far below lay a great wooded valley, with a gleam of dark water in its depths. It stretched—the valley—in a vast stillness as far as the eye could reach. Musard, who stood beside me, told me that in the plains beyond this encompassed valley fossilized bones of glacial man had been found—remains to which all our known civilizations were as nothing in point of age. What, then, did this untrodden valley hold in its keeping? That was for us to see.

"We started to descend into it. The ascent was a nightmare, but the descent was worse. Again, it was as though Nature, if the summit was won, was sullenly defending every inch of the downward way—at least, that seemed quite plain to me. We encountered all kinds of tremendous obstacles: dizzy precipices, roaring torrents, glaciers, and (below the snowline) treacherous shifting wastes of volcanic sand.

"We must have been half-way down when the terrible calamity happened. The route had become somewhat easier, but it was still necessary to walk with great care, for the ground was rough and broken, and split here and there by narrow but hideously deep chasms.

"I lagged behind the party to have a look at a waterfall not far from the zigzag path, and when I reached it a projecting buttress of rock shut out my companions from view. It was growing dusk, so after a brief glance at the water leaping into the dim silence below, I turned away to rejoin the others, for I had no

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fancy to be left alone. So I emerged from the rocks down which the waterfall ran, and hurried back to the path. To my amazement the members of the expedition were not in sight.

"At first this did not alarm me unduly, because I thought that a bend of the precipitous downward path hid them from my view. But I hastened forward rapidly, shouting as I went, eagerly scanning the dropping path for a glimpse of their retreating figures below.

"And then, quite suddenly, I saw.

"THE PATH, swinging sharply and steeply away to the right, came to an abrupt ending a few feet from where I stood. Beyond that was nothing—no earth, no trees, no mountain-side—but only a vast, stupendous hole. Below me a great mass of the mountain had broken away. How deep that awful chasm was, you may perhaps faintly conjecture when I tell you that I had heard no sound of the fall. The shelf of rocky earth had simply broken off and gone toppling into the depths below. From the void a thin column like smoke floating upwards—the dust, I supposed, of the mass of earth falling far below.

"I ventured down a step or two, with some idea of looking over the brink. That was a folly which almost cost me my life. The path seemed to crumble and tremble beneath me. I found myself slipping, slipping, and it was only by a desperate effort that I managed to clutch at some kind of cactus growing not far from the horrible edge. Slowly, and with infinite caution, I dragged myself upward again, and when I was once more on level ground, above that pit of nothingness, I flung myself face downward on the grey rocks and cried like a child.

"It was idle to speculate how it happened. The range was of volcanic origin, as the geological formation showed. And the whole of that part of the descent was cleft and fissured with cracks. Perhaps the weight of the men on the projecting ledge, which the path skirted on its downward course, had caused it to give away and precipitate the mass of rock and earth thousands of feet into the ravine below. Or it may have been some sudden paroxysm of nature—one of those hidden and terrible convulsions of which earthquakes are made. But however it had occurred, I was left there alone, in that vast, mysterious mountain, shut off from all human succour and aid.

"Nor was that the worst. I could not have turned and gone back over the summit even had such an effort been possible to me. Looking upward, I saw that the land slide had spread far above me, and a portion of the path overhead, down which I had descended, had been swept away. Thus I was blocked off from that remote hope of safety, like a rat in a stopped hole. There was no other course open for me but to go down the mountain, if I could find a way, into the Valley of Ghosts.

"This I presently attempted to do. As I began to recover from the shock I knew that it was useless and dangerous to stay where I was. Great masses and fragments of rocks kept crashing at intervals, and followed the previous avalanche into the abyss below. And presently the gaps and fissures running at right angles towards the edge of the precipice showed an ominous tendency to widen, as if the whole of that part of the mountain was in danger of giving away. So I stumbled to my feet and left the spot hurriedly, stumbling, plunging in haphazard fashion down the mountain's side.

"That descent was a nightmare. I took no thought of where I was going, and knew nothing except that I was climbing down, sometimes glissading at a rapid pace, sometimes dropping outstretched over a dizzy cliff face. I remember creeping along the edges of precipices and forcing my way through dark gullies in which thick, sighing pines grew. I climbed great boulders, and leaped across rifts where dislodged pebbles dropped soundlessly into incredible depths.

"On and on I went, down into the labyrinthine depths of the Valley of Ghosts, with that sense of desolation, which every mountain climber knows, intensified a hundredfold by the misery of my posi-

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tion. Nothing broke the awful silence. The only sound that reached my ears in the solitude was the echo of my footsteps as I hurried on. Through a dead world I moved, like a man wandering on another planet devoid of all life. And after a while the solitude and silence got on my nerves, and I began to look over my shoulder as I walked. Foolish, of course; but I would have welcomed the company of one of the ghosts of the valley just then. But those denizens of the solitudes kept to themselves.

"Then it began to grow dark, and I wondered with a sinking heart how I was going to spend the night. And even as I asked the question it was answered for me in a most unexpected way. For some time past I had been making my way along a much easier path through a kind of sloping valley interspersed with trees. Presently, as I hurried on, the valley contracted into a rather sinister sort of gorge. Where it narrowed and grew deep I paused, wondering whether I had better go on. It was then I saw it. Right before me, to my amazement, my eyes discerned a low and narrow hut, and beyond it a strange, crouched figure in the dusk.

"IN THE gathering darkness I saw an Indian squatting on the ground, engaged in some occupation which I could not plainly make out. Descending into the hollow of the gorge, I went across to the tree by which he crouched, and beheld him in the act of filling a hole which suspiciously resembled a grave. He was raking in the earth with his hands, shuffling it in with extraordinary rapidity. So deeply occupied was he with this task, which he accompanied with a strange and dirge-like chant, that he did not see me until I was quite close to him. Then he looked up. He was very old, attired in a long, loose robe of some kind of hide, and was wearing a necklace made of monkeys' teeth. There was something weird and unholy in that bent, muttering figure, throwing clods into a narrow deep hole with two withered hands like claws. He had not moved as I approached, but regarded me with an incurious eye.

"I had been studying the dialect of the Inca Indians with Musard since leaving England, and I tried him with that tongue.

" 'What are you doing?' I asked.

"To my amazement he answered in English:

" 'I am Munyeru, and bury the dead—the seeming dead,' he replied.

"I started at these words. 'What do you mean by the seeming dead?' I said.

" 'Some who die are not for ever dead—the first time,' he answered, still rapidly shuffling earth into the grave. 'Bwambi, no! They can be restored to life, my son—on conditions. Ai-ie! but that is something few white men know. When the white man dies, his friends, not knowing better, bury him deep, and leave him buried—to rot. And they, the seeming dead, wake up by and by in the grave with the weight of much earth above them, and they stare into the blackness, and cry out with choked lips; but of what avail? They are beyond all help, and their cries are suffocated in their throats. Ai-ie! white brother, but this happens to most of you.'

"My heart stirred a little at these strange words and the vision of appalling horror they brought up, though I knew they could not be true. Who was this old Indian to say what happened to a man after the jaws of the grave closed on him? In silence I stood there watching him until he had completed his work.

" 'Who have you buried there?' I asked him, as he rose to his feet.

" 'One of my tribe,' he said. 'Mano-aiambi! I shall dig him up in two days and restore him to life—on the condition by which he is permitted to live again.'

"I thought of asking him what the condition was, but stopped at the absurdity of the idea. 'You speak of white customs and talk their language; what do you know of the white man?' I said.

" 'Much!' he replied in a solemn voice. 'I have lived among your race; ai-ie! for many years.'

"I wondered where he had lived with them, and how he had got back to his tribe in this mysterious valley, cut off

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from the rest of the world by the great range. But I did not ask him that just then. I was too tired and overwrought—too much in need of rest and food. Humbly I asked him if he could give me food and shelter for the night. He nodded in response, and beckoned me to follow him into the bare interior of his hut, where he set out a meagre meal of maize cakes, together with a water-jar.

"I supped frugally, and not very comfortably, chilled by the reflection that I was taking my meal in the midst of my host's cemetery; for after what I had seen I had a pretty clear idea of what the mounds I saw around the hut meant, whether the occupants of the graves had been 'restored' to life or not.

"Darkness fell upon the face of the mountains as we sat there, and the old Indian kindled a small lamp of antique shape, which gave forth a rude flame. By its light I was able to observe him more clearly than before. He was much older than I had at first supposed, and his single, straight-falling robe covered a shrivelled frame, but he had a look of surprising dignity and authority in his thin, dark face. He wore his hair long, drooping on both sides of the head, and held together with a fillet of metal which ran round his brow. As this glistened in the light of the lamp I saw that it was inscribed with the figures of serpents with uplifted heads about to strike—the symbol on the contorted rock which had caused our guides to desert the expedition and flee when they encountered it on the farther side of the mountain.

"The eyes of my companion I only saw once in the light that night, when he bestowed upon me a penetrating gaze. And I did not want to meet them again. There was something in their depths which daunted me, and I was glad that thereafter he kept them fixed upon the ground.

"He asked me how I had gained the valley, and listened in silence to my story of the ill-fated expedition there. He told me, quite simply, that he did not think there was anything in the valley to bring an expedition of white men to that remote spot. Only a community of pastoral Indians, of which he was the witch-doctor and chief, who lived on the shores of the lake below, where they cultivated tobacco and maize. I was disappointed to learn that the Indians were of ordinary stature, and that the lake contained no fabulous or prehistoric beast. But though I knew it not, I was on the verge of a far greater discovery than any of these things.

"The old Indian offered me tobacco, and promised to take me down to the settlement when morning came. He was quite friendly and gentle with me, perhaps because he had lived for years among the whites; but behind his calm gentleness I glimpsed something sinister and brooding, if you understand; something that chilled me with a sense of fear. And always there was in my mind what he had told me of the seeming dead, and what I had seen him do. But, as I say, he was friendly in spite of these things. Profoundly I trusted that his influence over his tribe was powerful enough to compel them to adopt a similar attitude towards me. We remained talking far into the night, and then sought repose on the floor of the hut.

"In the morning the Indian was early astir, and cooked some more maize meal at a small fire. When we had partaken of this, we set out for the lake at the foot of the mountain. In the course of an hour's walk we reached a natural terrace commanding a view of the lake below, with a considerable village of small dwelling-places clustered along the brink—one-storied huts built of mud and wood, or adobe bricks.

■ "WE DESCENDED to this settlement. To my surprise, the Indians I saw engaged in various occupations along the shores of the lake and the fields close by paid very little attention to me. A few glanced towards the old Indian and myself, and one or two strolled a few steps towards us for a nearer view, but that was all. Indians are a notoriously incurious race, but these lakeside dwellers seemed to have conquered the foible altogether. They were extremely industrious, for Indians,

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some hoeing and planting, and others ploughing with teams of small, black oxen in the fields.

"I also saw the graceful shapes of some women coming in Indian file through a crop of maize, bearing earthenware water-jars on their heads. One thing struck me as peculiar, and that was to find a community of lakeside dwellers engaged exclusively in agricultural pursuits. But not a sail of any kind could I see on the vast sheet of water of the lake; not a fishing boat or smack, or even an Indian canoe. I turned to Munyeru at my side, and asked him if none of the Indians ever went upon the lake to catch fish.

"He shook his head. 'Nagu-ru-wahia—the Lake of Flamingoes—is sacred,' he said.

"His reply aroused my curiosity. 'Sacred to whom?' I said.

"It is the dwelling-place of the Sun and the moon, and of One who is greater than both,' he answered gravely.

"I looked at him inquiringly. 'What do you mean?' I asked.

"In reply he elevated a withered arm, and pointed to an island dim and distant in the far waters of the lake.

"'Yonder is the island of Murihi-e-nong, white man, which means the Hidden Place. The Sun lives there, with his woman the moon. It is permitted to see him sink into his cave at night, and to behold his white-faced woman rise from hers; though she, being a woman, does not always come forth. Bwambi! The Sun and the Moon are great gods, who rule this world; but there is One greater than they—One who rules the unseen world, where all is darkness and gloom.

"'Ai-ie! Much greater is he, and ever to be feared, for he is the Swift-footed One, who crosses the lake in a stride. All men fear him, and dread to see his face, for he is the enemy of all and Father of the Devil, for he is great Death himself. Ah-mbwa-zovu. He is the third and greatest god who dwells on the island, and these dark waters are sacred to him. No man may dare to look in their depths after dusk, after the good God Sun has gone to his cave, for it is then that Death flies abroad, and even to see the reflection of his shadow in the water is to die. Ai-ie! No man may see his shadow—and live!'

"He ceased. In a flash the meaning of his words was made clear to me. By fortuitous chance I had reached a spot in this inaccessible valley, guarded so jealously by three towering, snowy peaks, where a remnant of the ancient Inca Indians survived and worshipped at the shrines of the oldest form of worship in the world. 'Something hidden behind the ranges.' It was here. I had discovered it; it was waiting for me. Here was the sacred lake which it had been the dream of archaeologists to find, dotted with the islands venerated in Inca days, and still worshipped secretly by a handful of Inca descendants.

"The Sun, the Moon, and Death; that was the Inca Trinity. On the brink of this deep and dark lake, of so very large size, encompassed by the frowning mountains I had crossed, were practised the mystic rights of the Worship of the Sun, together with a more sinister and older worship still. Here was the abiding-place of the forgotten Sun Worshippers, and of the more secret Death (or Devil) Worshippers too! My brain reeled at this strange discovery. For a moment I could hardly believe that I was in a world of sober reality at all. Then I glanced at the old man beside me, and again observed the snake totem in the iron fillet which bound his hair. I wondered why I had not gathered the significance of that before. I looked at him with wonderment—almost awe.

"'And have you seen Death, who dwells on the island of Murihi-e-nong?' I said at last, in a low voice.

"He gave me a strange glance in reply.

"'Ai-ie, Nogul (white man), I have seen him, for it is permitted me to behold him,' he slowly said. 'For I am his servant; yea, I, Munyeru—the servant of the Swift-footed One. But I may not talk of these things.'

"He made a strange gesture with his arm in the air, as if warding off something evil, and then turned away from the

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edge of the lake. I followed him in silence, my mind full of thought. We went a short distance up the valley into which we had come, and at length we reached a small, flat-roofed hut, standing by itself in a grove of trees. My companion opened the door of this primitive dwelling and turned to me.

"'Nogul,' he said, 'here is your dwelling-place. A woman will bring you your food and drink.'

"With these words he left me abruptly. I stood where he had left me, watching him making his way upwards towards the height where I had encountered him overnight—the grove where he buried and dug up his 'seeming dead'."

Chapter 6

THE DWELLING-PLACE OF DEATH

"THE HUT which was to serve as my quarters stood at the edge of a narrow strip of jungle, and looked out upon a narrow inlet of the great inland lake. From the doorway I could see the moving water between a line of trees, lapping gently upon a narrow beach of dark, volcanic sand.

"I determined to have a closer look at this spot by-and-by. But just then I made out the figure of a woman approaching the hut. She came with measured steps—a tall barbaric apparition, dark of skin, with high cheek-bones and glittering black eyes. She deposited a platter of maize cakes and a jar of water within the hut, and departed as she had come, without a glance at me. I stood and watched her deliberate progress until she was out of sight. Then I closed the door behind me and made my way down to that narrow inland beach.

"The small inlet of sluggish water beyond the fringe of dark sand was perhaps a furlong in length. Past the hut it narrowed rapidly and lost itself in the hills, but in its downward course it widened greatly before reaching the lake. The shores of the lake where it entered were marshy and flat, thickly wooded in parts, and entirely hidden from the community of Indians and their huts half a mile away. I walked along the sand to the lake, and stood long by the muddy brink, gazing across the water to that dim island in the distance, veiled in enormous shadows. It was a strange, eerie spot, which might have well served for the lurking-place of Death. I tried to banish thought of the old Indian's story, but it remained. The solitude and silence were intense, and I could see no living thing on that desolate shore. The bushes were motionless; not a rustle, not a sound.

"I looked down into the water. Though clear, it was black as ink, and of great depth. Shadows brooded over it, making a kind of twilight atmosphere there. They came from the overhanging cliffs of the mountain shutting off the sun's rays. They could not penetrate the giant buttress to that depth: down to the surface of the lake. In the evening, no doubt, it was a different thing. Then the sun descended on the western side of the lake and lit up the dark waters with a dazzling splendour as it dipped behind the island—dropped into his island cave, as his nightly setting appeared to those lake-side Indians' eyes.

"As I walked along the margin I came across some great birds perched motionless on long slender legs in the shallows thick with reeds. I saw a species of black ibis, worshipped in Egypt of old, and a number of flamingoes of lustrous sheen—a contrast in black and red flame. Afterwards I learned that the native name of the lake meant 'the water of red birds,' because of the clouds of flamingoes which came there each night. There were not many on the lake just then; a dozen or so at the most, but the dark waters were brighter for their presence, dotted round the mirrored edge. Neither they nor the ibis vouchsafed the least notice of me.

"After a while I returned to the hut, but time hung intolerably heavy on my hands. I had nothing to do and nothing to read, and there was nothing to see; only the eternal solitude of that spot. As I stood regarding the scene drearily, I was seized with the idea of having a

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bath in the water which slipped almost past my door. These ancient Incas were hospitable people according to their lights, but water for washing did not appear to enter into their scheme of existence, and the hardships of mountain climbing had left me in a filthy state.

"So I undressed myself by the shores of the inlet, and plunged in. I do not know when I have received a greater surprise. The water, instead of being heavy and cold, as like water usually is, was warm and delightful as sea water in a hot July. Moreover, it was as buoyant and easy to swim in as a calm Devon sea. I could not account for that until I tasted it, and then I discovered the reason—the water was salt. It was a salt inland sea—saltier, by far, than the water of the Channel at home.

"Lake water is usually more difficult and heavy to swim in than the ocean. But the buoyancy of this water was an astonishing thing. As I have said, it was really a very salty inland sea, in which a good swimmer might swim for hours without becoming fatigued. At least, that was the impression it gave to me as I disported myself in the narrow arm of water there. I swam to the opposite shore and back again. Exhilarated and refreshed, I then swam down to the mouth of the lake and up again to the place by my hut.

"PERHAPS IT was the ease with which I accomplished this swim which first put into my head the idea of swimming across to that mysterious island which Munyeru had pointed out to me. I imagined it to be not more than a mile and three-quarters from the brink of the lake near the hut, or two miles at most, allowing for the extra distance from the lake up the inlet to the narrow strip of beach. It might be a little more or less; who could tell? That distance, more or less, was nothing to a strong swimmer like myself. I had done quite a lot of long-distance swimming since a boy.

"The thought came to me that night as I sat alone in the hut, wondering what fate was to befall me in the hands of these Indians among whom my lot had been so strangely thrown, these forgotten people dwelling on the shores of an unknown lake. I did not trust them in spite of their seeming apathy at my presence there. Their indifference was more disconcerting than a show of enmity, because it might well mask something for which they could afford to wait. Whether it meant craft or violence I could not tell. It might mean a stealthy spear-blade thrust between my shoulder-blades in the night. And why not? Why should they tolerate my presence there, unasked, in that sacred spot? I had dropped down among them like a man from the moon, and my appearance must seem incomprehensible to them. Nor could they understand, unless Munyeru explained.

"I doubted if he would. I did not altogether trust their ancient witch-doctor and priest. There was a wild look in the depth of his sombre eyes for which I did not care. And he was an enigmatic and sinister figure at best. Despite his apparent mildness and friendliness, that unholy apparition who dug up the dead with his own hands at night might at that moment be plotting my death. In this I wronged him, as you will presently see. But just then I only know that I was a prisoner in his hands, and that he could do with me what he would. He might have been digging a grave for me at that moment in his horrible grove. How was I to tell?

"So ran my thoughts. And, thinking thus, it seemed to me that as the lake was held in such superstitious veneration by the Indians I should be better off on the island than where I was, and in considerably less danger of my life. Of course, I did not believe that the island was the abiding-place of Death; no, not then. But the Indians did, and if I put the waters of the lake between them and myself I should be safe from pursuit, after what Munyeru had said.

"The waters of the lake were sacred, and no Indian dared venture upon them at any time. I meant to make the island the first stage of my ultimate escape.

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There were other islands dotted in the distance, as I had seen. My idea was to swim to them at my leisure, and so reach the lake's western shore, in order to make my way out of the Valley of Ghosts and back to civilization through some opening in the mountains on the farther side.

"Such was my plan. I had another thought too—a wish to behold the Island of the Sun and Moon and Death with my own eyes. Although I smiled in my superior wisdom at the Indian superstition of the Sun and the Moon and Death dwelling there, I had little doubt there were wonderful images and shrines of the Inca religion hidden away on the Sacred Island—venerated relics which investigators of Aztec history would give years of their lives to see. What a triumph if I should be the first to set eyes upon those holy mysteries of the Sun Worshippers, carefully guarded from profane eyes of thousands of years! The Inca priests, no doubt, were responsible for the cunning legend that Death dwelt on the island, in order to keep the ignorant Indians from setting unhallowed feet on the place. I was the only white man who had ever found his way into this hallowed valley, so here was my chance!"

He broke off abruptly, sighed, looked anxiously at the door, and then went on.

"I did not make any attempt until the third night of my enforced stay there—three days of entire solitude in that lonely valley, for my food was replenished while I slept, and I saw no living thing except the flamingoes, which came to the lake in great flocks each night, and departed again with the dawn.

"I had gone to rest on the third night without any definite intention of an immediate attempt to escape, and after sleeping for some hours awoke with a start to find the moon's rays shining in my eyes and filling the interior of the hut with radiance. I sat up suddenly, enveloped in a wave of light. Then I went to the door of the hut and looked out.

"Outside it was a glorious night of almost tropic warmth. In the distance the lake shimmered like quicksilver in the moonlight, and beyond the line of trees in front of the hut the placid waters of the inlet murmured gently on the strip of beach. I can see it now—the resplendent light, the glittering sand, and the wide sweep of that mysterious lake like a mirror set in an ebony frame. As I looked towards it and the dim, faint shapes of the islets upon it, a voice within me seemed to whisper: 'Go! Now is your time!'

"Strange how things in life happen to one. The prompting—the impulse—was irresistible. At all events, I did not try to resist it. At that moment I seemed to be in the grasp of some volition stronger than my own. Without a moment's hesitation I made a bundle of as many of my clothes as I could carry on my head, and walked down from the hut to the narrow channel, where the water rippled and lapped on the volcanic sands like molten gold. It glittered enticingly as if inviting me to come in.

"I touched it with my foot as a swimmer will, and found it warm and delightful as a summer sea. With outstretched arms I plunged in. Quickly, with a long, easy stroke, I swam to where the inlet broadened out and flowed into the lake. Without a pause or a backward glance I struck out boldly into the deeper and stiller waters of the wide, inland sea.

"FOR A time all went well. I felt like a man stocked with a store of inexhaustible energy as I cleft my way forward and went out into the deep waters of the lake. The moon shone brilliantly upon the black, motionless surface, and my white form cleaving through. But as I swam onward the stillness and desolation grew increasingly hard to bear. It was so still that the swift motion of my body slipping through the water reached my ears like a deafening roar of spray. I was using the over-arm stroke at first, and going along at a great pace. Then I changed over to the breast-stroke and went on strongly, trying to keep at bay all thoughts of loneliness, my eyes fixed on a faint star far ahead.

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"I went on for another hour, and then began to feel slightly uneasy at the knowledge that the island I had set out to reach was apparently very little nearer to me that at first. According to my reckoning I had been in the water for a good three hours, yet the island still flickered in the moonlight like a shadow—dark, vague, appallingly remote. I asked myself whether it might not be wiser to return, but I gave a gasp of dismay when I looked over my shoulder and saw how far the valley had been left behind. It was but a blurred outline now—no more. The inlet, the trees, and the shores of the lake had vanished from sight. There was nothing for it but to go on.

"The situation in which I found myself did not alarm me unduly at first. As I have said, I was an excellent long-distance swimmer, and I felt that I had still plenty of strength left. So I went on doggedly, though a trifle anxiously perhaps.

"And, after swimming a little while longer, I became aware that I was changing my strokes too frequently, which is always a bad sign. I went from breast-stroke to side-stroke, then from the half-trudgeon to the over-arm, and then back again to slow and easy swimming on the breast. Frequently, too, I kept rearing my head from the water to look at the island ahead, and it seemed to stare back darkly at me. But, oh, so far away still!

"Then, all of a sudden, I seemed to lose my growing sense of fatigue. I was only conscious of being swept along, as through space, without any effort of my own, like a disembodied spirit floating through the black void of eternity, beyond the realms of time, earth, and sky. This material planet of earth and water crumbled away. I seemed to be soaring: soaring through space—a spirit carried upward on giant wings.

"This feeling passed suddenly away. I was back again in the dark waters of the lake, swimming wearily now, an intolerable lassitude weighing down my frame and compressing all my limbs. The water, once so buoyant, had become thick and heavy and sluggish. It seemed sticky and viscous too—like struggling through a sea of blood. Each stroke cost me an effort, and the clothes I carried on my head were intolerably heavy, like lead. I kept on, though conscious that my strength was failing me as I swam. But the water kept drumming in my ears that this Island of the Sun and Moon was also the Island of Death, who was lying there in wait for me. Munyeru's warning came back to me then: 'The dark waters of the lake are sacred to him. . . . No man nay see his shadow—and live. . . .'

"I fought against these thoughts. With an effort I again raised my head, and searched the faint, glittering darkness ahead. I was not going to give in if I could help it. And it seemed to me as I looked that I was much nearer the island now. The oblique rays of the moon, setting fast, gave to my tired eyes a distinct view of my goal. I could see the shape of the cliffs, a strip of shelving beach, and the feathery outline of a group of tall palms. It gave me renewed courage—that sight. It told me I was only a short distance away now. With a great effort I swam on.

"Nearer I came, until I could see a savage cliff, and some tangled jungle growth forming a thick screen across the interior of the island—a thick deep screen through which the dying rays of the moon cast a curious afterglow, lambent and weird, like green flames flickering behind bars in a pit. And my eyes seemed to make out strange things in the glistening depths of the tenebrous foliage: sleeping apes, a great roosting bird, and the sleek folds of a serpent hanging pendulous from a horizontal branch which swayed slightly to and fro with the reptile's weight.

"I swam on now with the feeling that invisible hands were snapping one by one the last frail supports of my strength. But I drew steadily nearer that cursed isle. I struggled on until I could hear the dark waves lapping against the shore, and discerned tangled vegetable growths hang-

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ing down over the edges of the cliffs like a fringe of matted hair. But my limbs, so weary before, grew wearier still as I drew near to that dark haven of my swim. I felt like one who had swum beyond everything in life.

"The curious green afterglow, falling on the sluggish surface of the lake, revealed the waters around the island to be tinged with a reddish hue, and those ghastly green rays shone upon a tired man in a crimson pool. It had felt like blood before, and now the colour was there. The horrible fancy assailed me that I was fighting my way through clotted and stagnant blood. And from the shore ahead the air blew in my nostrils heavy and tainted, like a whiff from the corruption of a corpse. I began to wonder, desperately now, if I should ever reach the shore.

"AT THAT moment, as I looked towards it, something stirred in the thick bushes overhanging the line of the cliffs, and I heard a sound like a faint and mournful cry floating upward into a dark and empty sky. Then all was still again. Looking up—I was swimming on my side at the time—I had a momentary vision of some vague, indistinct thing flapping from the island through the air above my head: a strange, long, skinny shape which sickened all of my senses with a nameless and indescribable fear. I had the merest glimpse of it as it winged past me in the darkness overhead, but the glimpse filled me with a fearful horror of some mysterious and appalling apparition, as if my eyes beheld the passing of the spirit of evil itself. And at the sight my strength failed me utterly. I found myself sinking.

"Down I went into the sluggish red depths; down and down, and the water closed above my head. The outline of the island, the green and lambent glow, that skinny, flapping shape piercing the heart of the darkness overhead—these things disappeared from my view. I had only two conscious thoughts: one of regret at being drowned within sight of the island after swimming so far; the other one of astonishment at the great depth of the water in which I sank. These thoughts faded, and I saw in a flash an English home beneath grey skies. My dead mother was there, and she uttered my name. This vision disappeared, to be replaced by a sensation of ecstasy and lightness, of a happiness so wonderful that it was maddening pain. And, finally, a moment of dread consciousness—of paroxysmal convulsions in oozing mud, when my water-logged lungs seemed to be trying to force their way from my tortured breast. Then darkness.

"When I returned to my senses it was daylight, and a burning sun was streaming through an open doorway upon my uncovered head. Dreamily I realized I was back in the valley, lying in the hut I had left. Outside the door I could see the tuft of trees and the narrow path which led down to the narrow inlet of the lake. I had no knowledge of how I came to be back in that place, nor at that moment did I particularly care. Weakness and extreme lassitude held me in a fever grip, and all recollection of that frightful swim was mercifully blotted from memory just then.

"My mind was curiously blank, just as if I had been created fully grown, with conscious faculties but no past—a man like Adam. I was aware of nothing but material objects—the sky, the water, the trees outside, and the hut in which I lay. I remember fixing my eyes with intense interest upon a large hairy spider creeping up the side of the hut, and wondering what the insect was, and what it was doing there. My speculations were dreamy, childlike, like those of a man hovering beyond the shadowy border of life. . . .

"How long I lay in this state I cannot tell, but after the lapse of a considerable time my meditations—such as they were—were interrupted by a crackling of the undergrowth near the hut. The sound reached me faintly, as if heard in a dream. Then the bushes parted, and a figure appeared in the doorway—a figure which stood there, looking down upon me. It was Munyeru. I seemed to recognize his dark visage with an effort, like a face

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in a dream. And as he stood there like a phantom, with a sudden rush of anguish memory came back to me. Munyeru seemed to return my look steadfastly, though without any sign of recognition in his black, sunken eyes. Then he entered the hut and bent over me, rubbing my lips and eyelids and nostrils with some bitter unguent which caused them to smart with pain.

"I uttered a feeble cry.

" 'Munyeru,' I said, 'what are you doing to me?'

" 'I do but make the breath of life sweet within you, Nogul. For you have been with the Seeming Dead,' he replied without desisting from his task.

" 'The Seeming Dead!' said I. 'Do you mean that I have been nearly drowned in that accursed lake? Was it you who saved me?'

" 'Bwambi, yes!' he replied. 'It was I who brought you here, Nogul, after the Swift-footed One let you go. Four days and night have you been with him, Nogul; ai-ie! four days and nights at the bottom of his pool. And then he cast you loose and let you float away.'

" 'Four days and nights!' I echoed, with a faint and sickly feeling of horror which I did not understand. 'You are mistaken in thinking so, Munyeru. It was last night—only last night—when I attempted to swim the pool.'

"He shook his head gravely. 'No; Nogul,' he replied, 'it is you who are mistaken. Ndiswamol is not this the twelfth night of the moon? And was it not on her seventh night that I came to your hut and found you gone? And it was not until last evening, after the Sun had gone into his cave, that I, Munyeru, walking along on the brink of the Sacred Water, saw by the light of his wife, the Moon, something entangled beneath the reeds where the Red Birds rest. With a long spear I cut the weeds which held you, and when you floated upward to the surface I lifted your body forth and brought you here.'

" 'How can that be?' I said, as boldly as I could, though beneath his dark stare I felt the blood turning to ice in my veins. 'If this thing happened as you say, Munyeru, I had lain at the bottom of the lake for four days and nights and therefore must have been dead. But, behold, I am still alive.'

" 'Nogul,' he said solemnly, 'do you know what this place is called? It is known as Rui-ch'itaanzha, which in your tongue means the Valley of Ghosts. As I have told you, the island whither you sought to go is the abode of Death, and the sacred waters which surround it are his. But nightly he wings his way across the dark water to slay, as he is commanded to do by One even greater than he; yea, the One who commands all things in the world, and is greater even than the Master of Light.

" 'At His bidding Death flies forth nightly, slaying north, south, east, and west, but when the cock stretches erect to greet the first streak of dawn he returns to his lair on the island, and rests there till night falls again. But his secret place is sacred, Nogul, and to set foot in it is sin. Whosoever sets foot upon the Island of Death must die. And the lake which surrounds it—the dark water of the Red Birds—that also is sacred, and to enter it is to die. Illungwe ai-ie, Nogul! You sinned against Death by seeking his place, and because of it you were drowned. But how could a white man know the law? Because you have sinned in ignorance it has been permitted me to number you among the Seeming Dead, and restore you—upon the conditions.'

■ "HIS WORDS reached me faintly, as if from a great distance away. I sat up in the gloom of the hut, looking at him incredulously.

" 'Munyeru,' I said, and I spoke with difficulty, 'what do you mean? Who gave you power over life and death?'

" 'Nogul,' he replied solemnly, 'I am the servant of the Sacred Dwellers of the Island—the three gods which are Life, and Light and Death. Because of my services the Master of Life, which your race call the Sun, has given me certain powers which are not to be lightly used.

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For to be the servant of the Dark One is not an easy task. The Master of Life knows that, Nogul, and has bestowed upon me strange gifts unknown to other men. For the Master of Life is compassionate, Nogul, and would destroy Death if he could. But there is One greater than he: M'Bwanzhi, the Unknown, remote and terrible and all-powerful, whose dread face is veiled in the clouds, and it is the decree of M'Bwanzhi that all living things must die.

" 'Against this decree none may appeal save the Master of Life, the Compassionate, who is for ever interceding with the Unknown for us poor weak ones of the earth, which He warms and enriches with His gracious light. And it is in His power to restore the dead to life—once, if He so wills it. And those so chosen are known as the Seeming Dead. Because I am the Master of Life's servant, as well as the servant of the Dark and Swift-footed One, He has imparted to me the means of restoring the Seeming Dead. When I found your body in the reeds of the lake, Nogul, I determined to restore life to you.'

" 'Why did you do it?' I heard myself say in a deadened kind of voice. 'Why should you have taken this trouble for me?'

" 'Why? Uambai-aula! Because, Nogul, as I lifted your body from the reeds, the gentle pity of the Compassionate Sun, who is the Master of Life, swept over me. My heart stirred within me as I looked down on you. For your skin was white and beautiful, shining with the sheen of youth; never had mine eyes fallen upon such a comely and milk-white form. "Ai-ie!" I cried in my heart. "Why should this young man be snared in Death's net? The Swift-footed One takes us all in turn—Wabwambi, it is true—but this youth has not yet had his time. What, I now asked myself, will Death do to his white limbs? The Dark One turns men into phantoms and crumbling bones. He swallows men but to spue them forth again into the grave. And in the grace everything is consumed: courage, pride, wisdom, love; the great muscles of men, the sweet faces of women, the laughing eyes of little children. Ai-ie-haero! Who is lord, who is slave there? Not man, but rottenness, is king. Sightless you lie, your strength decayed, your right hand powerless to pluck away the little worms which feed on your vitals." Ai-ie! Such were my thoughts, Nogul, as I looked down upon your white body on the brink of the lake, and I said that I would save you.'

"I looked at him weakly. He was like an apparition of Death himself just then, his thin jaws working, his sunken eyes shining darkly, his open robe disclosing the frail and shaking contour of his ribs. It was as though he saw his dread Master stalking abroad and defied his tyranny with feeble, outstretched arm. After a brief pause he went on:

" 'I saved you, Nogul, but it was hard. For had you not been dead four days and nights, cast away in the waters of Death? Wa-alo! At one time I thought the Dark One had you safely in his jaws, and would not let you go. But I laboured unceasingly over you, ai-ie! until the sweat poured out of my eyes, and I could not see. All night I worked upon you with my powers, Nogul; alone, in this place, whither I carried you on my shoulders. Bit by bit I loosened the Dark One's jaws, and dragged you forth, until this morning when the first faint glow of the Master of Life shone over the tree-tops. I saw your body shudder with renewed life. The Dark One disgorged you to me.'

"Muneru opened his mouth wide as he spoke these words, as if he were Death in the act of vomiting me forth. There was something in that action which turned me sick and faint. Again he went on.

" 'And now you are safe, Nogul. Those shining white limbs which cleaved the Dark One's deep waters so strongly are thine once more—if you do what I tell you. I have plucked you from Death's toothless maw, wherein all is darkness and decay: brought you back to light and love with the strong power the Master of Life has given me. Ai-ie, Nogul,

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the Swift-footed One is angry, but powerless. To-night his tom-tom will beat loudly, and he will leave his lair early, flying far and wide to gather a great harvest in revenge for the dainty body he has lost. But that is the way of life, Nogul. For one saved others must pay. And you are not safe yet. Death will seek to find you again.'

"I had listened to his words in silence, disagreeably impressed in spite of myself, as a man feels in the presence of some fantastic and dreadful manifestation which his reason tells him is untrue. There was little reason in me just then.

" 'But if what you say is correct, I was really dead, and had been dead for four days,' I murmured at length. 'In that case, how did you restore me to life?'

Again he extended his thin arm commandingly in the air.

" 'You must not ask that, Nogul,' he said gently. 'Ai-ie! are you not alive, and not laid low by Death? Bwambi, that is well, so let it suffice. The manner of your bringing back is not to be divulged. To do so would destroy us both.'

■ "HE TURNED his face sharply towards the door of the hut as he spoke, as though he heard something outside, and his dark face seemed to take on a grayish tint. And terror—unreasoning terror—was in my heart too, though I don't know why. Munyeru remained in a listening attitude for some time, then his tension relaxed, and he turned to me again.

" 'Your life is restored to you on conditions,' he said; 'two conditions which you must never disobey.'

" 'And what are they?' I asked.

" 'You must leave this valley to-night, Nogul, going with hidden face through a secret pass of the mountains, which is known to none but me. I will give you food and water to carry you across the desert. From there you will take the nearest way to the sea, where you will take a ship back to your native land, and never seek to return to the valley again. For to look on the faces of any you have seen in this place means instant and final death. The Seeming Dead who have been granted the second life must go forth to other lands, and never look upon the faces they have seen in their past existence again. To disobey is death!'

" 'Why?' I wonderingly asked.

" 'I know not why, Nogul. It is the law of the gods, from which there is no appeal. It is not given to any of the Seeming Dead to transgress it. Should you do so not I, nor the Master of Life, nor even the dread Unknown—ai-ie! not even the great god M'Bwanzhi, the Dweller of the Clouds—could save you. It is not given to any born of woman to beard Death twice. And those who have escaped him once are wise to let him forget their face. So the Seeming Dead, brought back by me, depart with their faces covered, and never return. For is not this the Valley of Ghosts, Nogul, where the dead flock from all parts, to be in their Master's kingdom, watching and working for him with invisible eyes? And if they saw you they would say to the Dark One: "Lo, Master, there goes one whom your finger has touched. Behold! He still walks erect in the sunlight, laughing you to scorn."

" 'Ai-ie! Nogul, it were better never to have been born than to brave the second swoop of furious Death! You must let him forget that he held you in his clutches for a while. For Death sees many faces, and forgets them fast. But his watchers remember. Bwambi! Their memories are long, and some of them walk this valley in human form, though none know who they are. And they would know you, Nogul, in a thousand moons from now. So you must never look upon the faces of any you saw here before your seeming death, or you will die.'

" 'I shall be glad to leave this place and never return,' I said, with truth. 'And you shall take me with veiled eyes through the mountain-pass.'

" 'You must go veiled across the desert also,' he said, with a serious air.

"I looked at him. 'Why should I cover my face going across the desert?' I asked.

" 'Because there is danger to you wher-

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ever the Incas dwell,' he rejoined. 'In their land also you must not behold any face you have seen before. That, also, Nogul, is the law.'

" 'It seems rather an unjust law,' I said.

" 'Nogul, I did not make the law, but I do not think it unjust. Men would accept harder conditions to escape from Death.'

" 'True,' I replied. 'Very well, Munyeru. I agree, of course.'

" 'It is well,' he replied. 'We will set forth before the moon rises to-night, but today you must keep close within the hut. And now, Nogul, listen to my last words, for after this I may not address you, for if you look on my face in daylight again you will die. Nogul, should you by will or chance violate the conditions under which you hold renewed life, the Swift-footed One will search the world for you to strike you down. But as you have been one of the Seeming Dead he must first see your face. This also is the law. If that happens, Nogul, you must hide yourself from Death and keep out of his way, that he may grow tired of watching for you and depart.'

" 'Most people would keep out of Death's way—if possible,' I murmured; 'but how is it to be done?'

" 'Death always gives warning of his approach,' he said solemnly.

" 'I never knew that', I rejoined. 'It has always seemed to me that Death mostly comes unexpectedly, cutting off people in the midst of their schemes.'

" 'Ai-ie! Nogul, that is true,' replied Munyeru thoughtfully. 'But he gives a warning, nevertheless.'

" 'What kind of a warning?' I asked.

" 'Nogul, He beats a small drum, but only those whose ears have already been pierced by its warning can catch the sound,' he said gravely. 'Only the Seeming Dead can hear it, because they have been made to hear.'

" 'How can they be made to hear?' I said, looking at him curiously.

" 'By sign of the Withered Grey Paw,' he answered. 'Listen well to me, Nogul, for I have saved you and I love you as a son. It is permitted to me, and none other, to know when Death goes forth in search of one of the Seeming Dead who has violated the law, for am I not the Dark One's servant, as well as the servant of the Sun and the Moon? So, Nogul, should you by folly or mischance ever break the sacred law, I will send you the sign, no matter where you may be. Do not ask me how I will send it nor how I shall know where you are. But you will receive it, Nogul, and at night. And by its presence at your door—by the sign of the clenched withered hand of the Grey Ape—you will know that Death is in search of you, and your ears will be attuned for the rolling of his drum.' "

FOR SOME time past the young man had grown more and more excited in the telling of his strange story, and he had now reached the end of it, so far as he was concerned. He hesitated and broke off abruptly, looking towards the door and boarded window like a man in mortal fear. Then he turned to me quickly and said:

"Did you hear anything?"

I listened, but there was no sound audible in the quietude except the distant sobbing of the sea. I said so. He gave me an anxious glance.

"How do I know if you are speaking the truth? Perhaps you are in a conspiracy to deceive me, like others."

"You should not say that, Edward," his sister interposed. "Mr. Haldham wants to help you, if he can. And he is not trying to deceive you in any way."

He turned on her savagely.

"I tell you Death is waiting for me with his drum," he said. "I cannot watch all the time. How am I to know when he is near?"

The whites of his eyes showed as he stared about him obliquely, like some hunted animal at bay. His sister and I exchanged glances. Then she turned and measured out some drops from a flask she took from her bag. Glass in hand, she went to her brother.

"Drink this, Edward," she said.

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He drank with a child's docility, and handed back the glass. It appeared to steady his faculties immediately, and his nervous tension began to relax. He sat down again, looking towards us with a tired face, but in a few minutes he grew drowsy and heavy, and his head dropped. His sister was watching him solicitously, and she asked him if he would like to try and sleep. To my surprise he assented, and she gave him a quick glance, which I understood. I walked towards the door, and downstairs into the lower room.

After the lapse of a few minutes she came down alone.

"I am going back to Charmingdene," she said, looking at me.

"Your brother?" I queried. "Will he sleep?"

She nodded. "He will sleep for some hours," she replied. "That was a sleeping draught I gave him just now. Dr. Penhryn told me to administer it whenever Edward had one of his bad turns—like last night. He is very ill."

She looked worn and ill herself, in the ashen morning light, her eyes ringed and dark with pain. But she gave me a brave smile, nevertheless. She had more pluck than her brother, it seemed to me, as she stood there pale but composed.

"Shall we go now?" she said simply.

Silently we left that deserted place. She closed the door carefully behind her, and together we set off across the path towards the finger-post showing in the distance the road above. Once in the course of our ascent I looked back at the iron-roofed hut buttressed against its shoulder of rock. The sea was coming in, and amid the fissures and "coffins" the rising tide writhed and squirmed. Below the black cliffs the surf sullenly screamed, and a few seagulls drifted listlessly overhead.

As we made our way home in the faint, chilly morn, Eleanor Chesworth completed the story which her brother had partly told me. And the conclusion, uttered by her lips, was as strange as the portion I had already heard.

The sequel began some months after Edward's return to England, shortly after they had come to Cornwall for the benefit of his health, which appeared to have been greatly shattered by his experiences abroad. His nervous system had been in a bad way ever since his return, but it was at Charmingdene that the first symptoms of dangerous excitement began to show. Sometimes, when out walking, he would start, and look back as he went along, as though some invisible foe were stalking him upon those lonely Cornish moors.

This state of mind grew gradually worse. And then one night (her face paled as she related it) she had gone into his room with a light to find him crouching in the corner in the dark, moaning and shaking with fear. At the sight of the light and the opening door he had stared in terror, and sprung up with a loud cry. She had managed to calm and reassure him after a while, and that night he told her a little of his weird experience in the Valley of Ghosts, which was something he had hitherto kept to himself.

This revelation—vaguely imperfect though it was—amazed her. At first his fears seemed so fantastic to her that she tried to rally him out of them, but the only result was to bring on a dangerous fit of excitement, which frightened her very much. Dr. Penhryn, who had been treating her brother for nerves since their arrival in Cornwall, warned her not to attempt ridicule again. Everything depended upon humouring him, so the doctor said. And that was the beginning of the young man's worst period of terror.

"It was after that he got into such a nervous state that he refused to go out at all," she said sadly.

Perhaps my look betrayed something of my secret thought, for she quickly added:

"You must not think my brother a coward, Mr. Haldham. Indeed, he is not. Before he went away on that unfortunate expedition he was brave and strong, though perhaps a little more highly strung and imaginative than the ordinary young Englishman. But he had changed

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greatly when he returned, though I did not notice it so much at first. It was when we came to Cornwall that he grew rapidly worse."

"He had a dreadful experience in that tragic exploring expedition," I said, sympathetically. "But he must try and forget about that now."

She gave me a strange kind of smile.

"You do not understand," she said. "But I do not wonder at that, because you have not heard all. I did not know myself until—until—the thing came. All I know was that my brother was dreadfully changed; forever starting and looking around him; paling with fear at the least sound. And then, one night . . . it came."

■ SHE PAUSED and glanced around the empty moors with an air of fear, then went on:

"It was one night when he and I were in the house alone. Dr. Penhryn had been to see my brother earlier, but had left some time before, and my uncle had driven over in the car to Penzance to transact some business there. I was reading, and my brother was sitting by the fire, staring into the flames. It was intensely quiet and still. As we sat thus I heard a curious kind of sound outside; something like a dog scratching with his paw on the front door. I glanced towards Edward, but apparently he had not heard. The scratching ceased as I listened, but it was followed by a knock—a single loud blow on the panel, as if made by a stick. Edward sprang up nervously, and stared at me across the room. Our eyes met.

" 'What was that, Eleanor?' he whispered, and I could see that he was shaking.

" 'I will go to the door and see,' I rejoined, as calmly as I could.

"He made no attempt to dissuade me, but just stared at me with the same petrified air. I left the room quietly, and hastened to the front door. I opened it. When I looked out I was surprised to see there was no one outside. The night was very dark, and I wondered if the caller might be standing below the steps in the gravel path. 'Who is there?' I called, but no sound came back to me except the sighing of the wind. Rather puzzled, I lifted the small lamp from the hall-stand, and again looked out. Its rays fell on the empty path. There was no one there.

"I was about to close the door when I became aware of a small parcel hanging from the door-handle; tied and swinging by a thin piece of string. I looked at it with startled eyes. It offered an explanation of the knock, but there was something almost uncanny in its presence there. Nevertheless I unfastened it, and stood there for a moment looking down at it in my hand. It was a small, flat package, about two inches square, wrapped in a kind of parchment or papyrus which I had never seen before, and fastened securely with a most peculiar kind of string—more like a dried filament or tendon than string. I puzzled over the idea of anyone doing up a parcel like that and leaving it at the door in that way. Then, with it in my hand, I took it into the sitting-room. My brother looked at me as I entered; then his eyes went quickly to the small object I held in my hand.

" 'Who was at the door, Eleanor?' he asked anxiously.

" 'Someone who didn't wait, but left this little parcel instead,' I answered with a smile. 'It was tied by this curious piece of string to the handle of the door.'

"There was no smile on his face as he sprang up and came forward, almost snatching the parcel from my hand. Hastily he cut the fastenings with a knife. Inside the outer covering was another, securely tied with the same peculiar sort of string. When Edward got the wrappings off at last a strange and most unpleasant object was exposed to view: a small and withered gray paw, not unlike a baby's clenched hand.

"I shuddered at the sight of it, but I shall never forget my brother's look when he saw what the parcel contained. He stared at it with a dreadful expression

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of face, and swayed slightly, as though about to fall. I ran to him anxiously.

" 'What is it, Edward?' I said. 'Are you ill?'

" 'The paw,' I heard him mutter. 'My God, it is the paw!'

" 'It is a horrible thing,' I said, glancing down at it as it lay upon the table. 'You had better let me throw it away. I wonder who can have sent it here?'

" 'You do not understand,' he said, still staring at it. 'It is a message—a message for me.'

"Until then I had never heard the complete story of his terrible experience in those Peruvian mountains after the other members of the exploring party were swept away. The events which had befallen him in the valley and that awful lake, he had preferred to keep to himself. Now, in a shaken voice, he told me all. I listened, hardly knowing what to say. It was too strange, too dreadful, too disconcerting for words. My brother told me everything in a whisper, with hardly a stir of his lips, his eyes fixed on that horrible paw all of the time. The coming of the paw was the message—the signal, he called it—that his life was in danger, and that Death was coming for him again."

Until then I had listened to Miss Chesworth's story in wondering silence, but at her last words I was fairly startled from my reserve. I looked at her wonderingly, and, I am afraid, with a slightly incredulous air.

"But surely you did not believe that to be true?" I asked.

"I don't know," she rejoined sombrely; "but it really did not matter very much whether I believed it implicity, and it had the most dreadful effect upon him. He became worse—oh, so very much worse!—after that, in spite of all we could do. Thereafter he remained the closest prisoner in his room, only going out with his face covered, at night—as you know. You may be sceptical—I suppose it is only natural that you should be—but it was the most dreadful truth to him. He was for ever listening behind his curtained window for the coming of Death with his drum. The other night he thought he heard the beating of the drum, coming toward the house. He fled in terror from it—fled across the moors to that lonely place on the cliffs. And now—you know everything."

She went on in silence with slightly heightened colour, a sad look in her beautiful eyes. I walked beside her in perplexity, turning this astonishing story over in my mind. I think that I should have gone so far as to express my utter disbelief in the whole uncanny business but for one thing. I remembered, with a sinking feeling of the heart, that I myself had heard the sound of a drum beating in the silence of the moors two nights before. That remembrance put a stopper on my tongue, and even staggered my incredulity a bit, though not to the extent of believing this preposterous story of Death stalking the Cornish moors in person, seeking for recruits to his black flag by the beat of a sinister drum.

But I kept these thoughts to myself, and I did not tell her I had heard the drum. She was too much worried and alarmed for me to add to her perplexity just then.

"It is possible there may be a certain amount of fancy about this," I ventured to say. "Obviously your brother is in a very weak state of health, and his nerves are badly upset."

She shook her head sadly.

"The grey paw was not fancy, at least," she replied.

I DID not quite know what reply to make to this, and murmured lamely something about the possibility of a practical joke. She shook her head again, and looked at me with her clear eyes.

"Played by whom?" she asked. "No, no, Mr. Haldham, that will not do. And you must remember that the coming of the paw was followed by the beating of the drum. My brother thought he heard it before. But there was no fancy about the other night, for I heard it myself—very faintly, in the darkness across the moors."

I asked another question:

"May I inquire what Colonel Gravenall thinks of it all?"

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"He shares your view that it is all imagination," she rejoined, looking at me coldly as she spoke.

"Please do not be unfair to me, Miss Chesworth," I protested, with a little warmth. "I was only trying to think of some explanation for it all."

She smiled a little wanly at that.

"To underestimate the danger is not likely to help Edward, but more likely to bring about his death. Dr. Penhryn told me so."

"Dr. Penhryn knows everything, of course?"

"How could he have attended Edward otherwise?" she replied. "My brother would not allow anybody to see him except the doctor and myself. That was one of the reasons why he hid his face when he went out in the car at night. But I do not think that he is afraid of you."

I nodded reassuringly, though I had my own opinion of that, and did not altogether relish the idea of having been looked upon as a kind of confederate of Death's.

She spoke again.

"Dr. Penhryn has been very attentive and kind. My poor brother leans on him very much indeed, and the doctor can do more with him than anyone else. Twice, during bad attacks, he stayed all night at Charmingdene with him in his room, and was able to control Edward's wild excitement when I could do nothing with him. Indeed, there are times when I do not know what I should have done but for him."

Her eyes glowed with gratitude, but I was ungracious enough to make no reply to her.

"It was Dr. Penhryn who told me not to attempt to keep Edward at Charmingdene if he wanted to get away," she explained. "He said it might be dangerous to detain him, in the present state of his health. So that night when he heard the drum and went away to the lonely place in the cliffs, I helped him to go, and arranged to join him there too. But he would not let me stay with him. He thought it would be safer in the hut alone. I knew it was not wise to oppose his wishes, though he was very weak and ill."

"I should have thought he would be better at Charmingdene with his nerves in such a state," I ventured to remark.

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "Dr. Penhryn says Edward's one chance of recovery is to let him have his own way. Rightly or wrongly, my brother believes he has been warned by the old Indian, and that if the figure in pursuit of him should see him, he must die. That is why he went away two nights ago."

"To hide from death?"

She bowed her head.

"But surely this is the wildest hallucination!" I exclaimed. "Surely your brother does not believe that Death walks abroad in England like a pirate in a play, looking for him with the beating of drums? Cannot he be induced to face this thing, whatever it is—even death." It was on the tip of my tongue to add "like an Englishman," but I stopped myself in time.

Her answer was very decided.

"No, for if he attempted to do so he would die. You see, this awful experience of his in that dreadful Valley of Ghosts was so real—oh, so terribly real to him! And this development is what he was told might happen. So he believes in it too."

"And you?" I asked. "Do you believe in it all as well?"

"You asked me that before, and I told you I do not know what to think. But I do know that my brother is in an alarming state, and that if this nervous trouble goes on he will surely die."

"It cannot go on," I agreed. "How long is your brother to stay at that wretched hut on the cliffs? He cannot remain there indefinitely."

She gave a light sigh. "I know," she murmured. "I was going to ask you to bring Dr. Penhryn as soon as we reach Charmingdene. He will know what to do. He told me to send for him at once if anything like this happened."

"Certainly," I responded, though with

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the inward feeling that she seemed to lean too much on that missshapen Cornish medico—as I was unjust enough to term Dr. Penhryn in my heart. She thanked me, and thereafter walked so quietly that I wondered if she repented of the impulse which had led her to confide in me. I, for my part, was busy with my thoughts. In silence we went on across the moors, until the hill-top where my employer surveyed the country with his glass unfolded for us a view of Charmingdene, and The Oysters outlined loosely in the distance against a low and pallid sky. A few minutes more would see the end of our walk. I glanced at my companion and spoke.

"I have been thinking over what you and your brother have told me, Miss Chesworth," I said, "and I believe that I can see a way of helping him."

The effect of my words was wonderful. She turned to me quickly with the light of hope in her eyes, and her hands moved impulsively in a girlish gesture.

"How?" she breathed, rather than spoke.

"I would like to think over my plan more carefully before giving you the details," I replied. "Can I see you this evening? I will tell you then. Of course you may not agree."

"I would agree to anything likely to help Edward," she replied, very earnestly. "Shall I come over to the garage after tea?"

"Yes, do," I said. "I will tell you my whole idea then."

She gave me a look of thanks, and we went on down the hill. As we reached Charmingdene she turned away with a friendly nod. I watched her until she disappeared inside the house, then went thoughtfully to my room to change my damp clothes. The car stood in the garage—sent back during my absence from Penzance. I was glad to see it; there was something in its return just then which inspired me with confidence and hope, though why I cannot say. Lightly I ran my hand over its glistening surface, as though it were a thing endowed with life and motion. A little later it was carrying me rapidly along the road in the direction of St. Bree.

Chapter 7

THE WATCH IN THE NIGHT

■ DR. PENHRYN was at home when I reached his house. He listened to my story with inscrutable face, standing in the middle of his library, an open volume in his hand. I did not tell him everything, but merely informed him that his patient had wandered off to the moors in a fit of delirium, and had found shelter in an old mining hut upon the cliffs, where he was now asleep. Of my share in finding him I said nothing, nor did I tell him that Edward Chesworth had imparted his story to me.

The doctor heard me with a kind of doubting coldness, as though he suspected me of keeping something back. That was a doubt he did not put into words, but when I had finished speaking he shot at me a sharp look. There was something in his expression which I did not quite like.

"Very well," he said. "I will return with you at once. I see you have your car, so I will come with you. That will be much the quicker way."

He replaced the volume on its shelf, and looked round for his hat and coat. Then he lowered the lamp, and we went outside. In the car he sat beside me, and I drove rapidly back to Charmingdene. There was no policeman or traffic to worry about on that desolate road, and my companion sat silent, apparently absorbed in thought.

Brief as my absence had been, Eleanor was anxiously awaiting us at the garden gate. As the car pulled up Dr. Penhryn sprang out, and went to where she stood. I noticed that he took both her hands in his, and that her face lit up with relief at his presence. She spoke to him rapidly, in a low, nervous tone. One broken phrase reached me where I sat—something about "two dreadful nights."

"I know, I know," I heard him reply,

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in his quick, emphatic way. "But now you are not to worry any more. I will go over at once. You were wise to give him the sleeping draught and send for me, but he must not be there alone when he wakes."

"I will return with you," she said.

"You would be better in bed," he answered, looking at her frankly with his fine grey eyes. For once, I was inclined to agree with him.

She shook her head sadly.

"No, doctor; I must come."

He shrugged his shoulders in a philosophical way, and turned to me in the car.

"You had better wait where you are," he said curtly. "Come inside, Miss Chesworth. I have something to say to you."

He left me rather chagrined at the abruptness of this address, though retaining sufficient sanity not to blame him for it. I was only the chauffeur there, as far as he was concerned. From the car my eyes followed them as they went up the garden path. The doctor held the girl's arm in a familiar way, talking earnestly as they went. They entered the house, and the door closed and shut them from view.

Half an hour passed before they came out again, talking earnestly, as before. They walked down the gravel path towards the car, and the doctor took some rugs from the girl and placed them inside the car. From these preparations I supposed they intended to bring the young man back. Eleanor did not glance at me as she got in, but Dr. Penhryn looked up to tell me to drive them to the place on the cliffs. His look, as he gave his direction, was both piercing and hostile. The thought came to me as I encountered it that he now knew more of my share in last night's events than I had imparted to him in his library an hour before. I supposed Eleanor had told him all.

I drove them to the cliffs. When the car stopped at the finger-post by the end of the moorland road, Dr. Penhryn helped his companion to alight, and with another sharp upward glance at me told me to wait by the finger-post until they returned. They went off down the path, carrying the rugs and other articles, for the comfort of the patient, as I conjectured. I wondered why they had not asked me to take these things across. Then it dawned on me that perhaps Dr. Penhryn did not want me at the hut.

Left alone, I walked up and down the road for a while. But that eternal vista of moors and rocks and empty sea was depressing to the sight, so I returned to the car, got in again in my seat. Drawing a rug about me—for the day was grey and chill—I lit a cigarette, musing again over the experiences of the night. But want of rest and the fatigues of the previous day soon overpowered me. Moorland and sea faded from sight. I fell asleep, with a half-smoked cigarette between my fingers.

■ I RETURNED to consciousness with a start. Stiff and cold, I stared about me, not quite sure where I was. My sleepy eyes took in the crooked finger-post, the deserted road, and the cheerless outline of the cliffs falling sharply to the sea. Gradually I came back to a sense of my surroundings, and of what had brought me there. Fully awake at last, I scanned the face of my watch, and saw that it was after two o'clock. I had been asleep in my seat for more than four hours. Vaguely I wondered what had become of my companions, and if they were still down in the empty hut over the deserted mining pit's mouth.

As if in answer to the question just then they came into view, making their way back to the car with a third figure supported by their arms. As they drew nearer this third figure took the shape of Edward Chesworth, wrapped from head to foot in rugs, so that he could neither see nor be seen.

There was something horrible and uncanny in his stooping and shrouded outline, led along like a blind man through that desolate place, a thick shawl muffling his face to prevent him seeing—what? As they mounted the path to the finger-post, I jumped down from my seat to open

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the door of the car. Eleanor, busy helping her brother in, did not look at me. It was Dr. Penhryn who told me to drive quickly home.

In my room, later, the remembrance of that swathed figure thrust itself upon my consciousness as something extraordinary and strange. A great curiosity came over me to know what was the meaning of Edward Chesworth's terrible morbid fear. What was at the back of it all, and what should it mean? Across the later events of that day a veil of secrecy had been woven, as if with the coming of Dr. Penhryn everything was changed. I was once more the chauffeur, put back in my place.

Such were my reflections as I mooned about the garage, wondering if Eleanor would come. The house seemed strangely silent, though there was nothing unusual about that. As I scrutinized its dark outline and thickly curtained windows I speculated whether Dr. Penhryn had gone—walked home instead of asking for the car. And what had become of the girl, and her promise to see me after tea? Forgotten, that promise; or repented of, perhaps. No doubt she regretted the impulse which had led her to confide in one who drove her uncle's car.

But there I wronged her. For presently she came; flitting in through the open door when I had given her up, only too anxious to hear what I had to say. She came quickly to where I was standing, questioning me wistfully with her soft, dark eyes.

"I am rather late," she said a little breathlessly, "but I could not leave Edward before. You spoke this morning of a plan to help him. Will you tell me now what it is?"

I told her. My plan, when explained, was quite a simple one. It was based on the theory that there might possibly be some natural explanation of these eerie manifestations which held her brother in such deadly thrall. My idea was to keep guard of nights for the sound of the drum, and if it beat again to go in pursuit. There was one point I asked her to make clear: was the coming of the drum anticipated only in the night, or did her brother expect the visitation also by day?

In reply to that she shook her head. Her brother was nervous and restless in the daytime, but he never seemed to fear the drum then. It was the nights to which he looked forward with horror and overmastering dread.

"Then tell him to be afraid no longer," I replied with a reassuring smile. "Tell him I will listen and watch from tonight. And if I hear the drum beating in the darkness, I will go and confront this thing, whatever it is."

I saw her grateful glance. She came closer to me, and I was conscious of the faint perfume of her hair.

"And you—are you not afraid to do this, for people who are . . . nothing to you?"

I might have told her I was doing it for her sake, but I refrained. I did, however, assure her that I was not afraid.

She looked at me wonderingly.

"And yet my brother believes the figure with the drum to be Death," she murmured.

"That makes no difference," I said lightly. "Death is not in search of me—yet. So I will keep watch"—again I felt inclined to add the words "for your sake."

Her eyes thrilled me. They seemed to shine with some deep feeling in the dusk. I could see she was anxious to accept my offer, but she still had thought for me.

"But you might have to watch for several nights," she said hesitatingly, "and you cannot do without sleep."

"I have thought of that too," I quickly replied, "and perhaps you can help me there. With a couple of hours' rest after daybreak I can easily keep watch until dawn. But there's the chance that when I do take my sleep it may last too long. If you would permit Mrs. Truedick to call me, I should have no fear of sleeping too late. Two—three hours' sleep—in daylight will be quite enough—"

"I will come and call you myself," she interposed, sympathy in her glance. "I would rather Mrs. Truedick did not know anything of this."

That was more than I had dared to ex-

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pect, and I hope my reply expressed something of what I felt. But she answered wistfully that it was little enough for her to do, when I was risking so much for her brother, and for herself as well.

"I am so deeply grateful to you," she went on, in a moving voice. "Oh, if you could only know what a weight you have lifted from me by this. How ever can I thank you?" Her lips quivered as she spoke.

"Why, that's all right, then," I told her cheerfully. "Now, I shall keep watch and ward to-night. You and your brother should be able to sleep in peace, knowing that I am patrolling the moors."

"I wonder if it is necessary to-night?" she anxiously said. "Dr. Penhryn will be staying late. He always does when Edward is very bad."

"Why, what difference does that make?" I asked in surprise.

"Only that Edward always feels so much safer when Dr. Penhryn is with him," she rejoined, with rather a forlorn effort to smile.

"But won't you and your brother feel safer if you know I am watching on the moors?" I said.

"Oh, yes!" she said eagerly.

"Very well. That is quite settled, then. And now, there is just one thing more. If you ever need me at any time through the night you have only to raise and lower one of the back bedroom blinds, holding a light in your hand. In the darkness of the moors or from my room upstairs—wherever I am watching—I shall be sure to see a signal like that, and I will go to the house at once. Will you do this?"

She nodded. "Thank you once more," she said simply, and then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, she laid her soft fingers in my oil-stained hand. I held them for a moment, but it had grown so dark in the garage that I could not see her downcast face. The next moment she turned quickly away, and was gone.

■ AFTER DARK I sat above at my open window for a while, then later went out upon the moors. Between the two I passed my first night of vigil, listening intently for the first faint throbbing of that infernal drum. And as the hours wore away I gained an inkling of Edward Chesworth's frame of mind, and was better able to understand his unhappy point of view. My first feeling when he told his story was to look upon him as an unworthy coward who had allowed sheer animal terror to master and overthrow his nerves.

But as I pondered the mystery through the silent night, it came to me with truer vision that this was to take too superficial a reading of his case. We English admire courage in a high degree. A thrill stirs our hearts at the record of some dauntless deed—of the last man in the trenches dying alone, rifle in hand. By that trite standard I had judged Edward Chesworth, forgetting that in his case it was not a matter of physical courage at all. He was face to face with the unknown, which calls for courage of quite another kind, and one with which the human heart is not so well endowed. For, say what you like, most people fear the unknown more than they care to admit.

Edward Chesworth had proved his courage of the conventional type. He had fought in the war, and faced the dangers of that tragic exploring expedition in heroic fashion. It was only after he had wandered into the Valley of Ghosts that his nerve had given way, and then not until he had been submerged in the dark waters of the mysterious lake. He had shown reckless bravery in undertaking his desperate night swim, and seemingly courage had remained his heritage until he sank, after seeing that nameless thing flapping overhead.

Who was to say what had happened to him after that, or what secrets of our dark existence on this planet revealed? Certainly not I, whose knowledge of life was based upon contact with actual and familiar things. Had he indeed been drowned in the lake, and restored to life again after four days? In that period had his shrinking eyes been opened upon the unknown, to be shown things which no

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living being may see? These were questions I asked myself, but could not find an answer to them. I remained incredulous, yet I cannot say that I wholly disbelieved. I had heard Edward Chesworth's story, and I had heard the drum; but I did not know what to think.

The first night of my vigil wore to its close without that strange throbbing of a drum vibrating in the silence of the moors. The quiet was intense until broken by the faint sighing of a little wind which was up and stirring in the last hour before dawn. Part of the night I spent at my window listening, but now and again I slipped down the wooden steps and walked softly about the moors, keeping an eye on the house all the time. It was dark and unlighted, and I hope that the inmates slept. Whether they did or not, it remained without sound. In the distance The Oysters seemed to nod drowsily in the gloom.

During one of these rambles the dawn began to show grey in the eastern sky. I stood on the hill watching the tremulous light of day spreading like a fan across the moors. My first sleepless night was over. I returned to my room, flung myself, dressed, on the bed, and in a minute was fast asleep.

It was Eleanor who awakened me at nine o'clock, with a tap on the closed trap-door. And she it was who a little later brought a breakfast-tray to me across the yard. She bade me a pleasant good morning, and said she would come for the tray in a little while. When she did, she stayed for a minute or two talking, and she told me, with a grateful look, that her brother had spent a very good night.

Thus passed three nights. Every evening, at dusk, I took up my watch, and each morning Eleanor came to call me and then brought my breakfast across the yard. But I did not hear the beat of the drum again on the moors during that time. And on the fourth morning Colonel Gravenall returned.

He came back without a warning—in reponse to a telegram, as I afterwards learned. It seemed strange that he chose to come home unannounced, and without sending for me to meet him at Penzance with the car. It appeared he engaged a taxicab at the station, and called to see Dr. Penhryn on his way to Charmingdene, though of that I had no knowledge at the time. But I do know that he took Eleanor and myself unawares. The feeling of intimacy between us had grown in the past few days. The nightly vigil (which, in a sense, she shared) had brought us together, in a way. I pitied her and thought much of her; though I kept both my pity and thoughts in my heart. At least they did no harm to the sympathetic understanding which we now shared.

That morning she had remained in the garage longer than usual, talking with an animation unusual in her. Three nights without sound of the drum had improved Edward Chesworth's health, and awakened hope within her as well. For this she was pathetically grateful to me, although I had no merit in the business at all. And that morning she lingered with me after my breakfast, talking to me in an unwontedly happy way, telling me of her girlish days, and her friends at school. In the midst of this talk the dog Pedro, standing near her, turned his head with a quick, whimpering sound. I looked from the garage, and there was Colonel Gravenall in the act of entering the house. Through the open back door I beheld his thin form on the front steps, and a shabby taxicab driving off from the gate in a cloud of white dust.

Eleanor saw him too, and with a quick glance at me went out of the garage. Whether her uncle saw her or not I cannot say, but he must have known that she had been out of the house.

Whether that had anything to do with what followed I could not tell. But I do not think so. For I guessed as soon as I saw him return in this unexpected fashion that there was something in the wind. And his arrival in a taxicab suggested that it had to do with my presence there. Intuition warned me that my time at Charmingdene was to be cut short. Indeed, my common sense jumped to that conclusion at once. But the end came

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with disconcerting suddenness, nevertheless. In short, it came that same afternoon.

I WAS in the garage when my eye caught the lean figure of my employer crossing the yard after lunch, picking his way across the slippery flags in the stealthy manner of a cat. He entered the garage in the same noiseless way. I advanced towards him, and waited for him to speak. As I did so I noticed that he held money—notes and silver—in his hand. His dark eyes glittered nervously, though not, I imagine, with fear of me. It was hardly likely that he should feel nervous of an employee he was about to dismiss.

With a few abrupt yet hesitating words he announced the termination of my job at Charmingdene. He regretted the sudden decision, but he had been advised to bring the nightly drives to an end. The medical view in both Harley Street and—er—Cornwall was that the drives were proving prejudicial to his nephew in the present weak state of his health. They had been—er—in the nature of an experiment, and as they had not proved beneficial they were to be discontinued forthwith.

So medical opinion advised him, and he was compelled to acquiesce, and discharge me with regret. My engagement was therefore finished, and I was at liberty to leave Charmingdene when I chose. But (he added) as I was leaving through no fault of my own, he proposed to add to my wages the amount of my railway fare back to London.

I heard this halting explanation in silence, though when he went to pay me I should have liked to tell him what I thought. It would have pleased me to refuse the money altogether, but unfortunately I was not in a position to stand on my dignity like that. I accepted the notes he proffered me, and asked him if I could stay at Charmingdene that night and return to London by the morning train. I knew he would not agree, but I wanted to hear what kind of excuse he would make.

He appeared to give the request quite an anxious consideration, before uttering a refusal with a gentlemanly expression of regret.

"I should certainly like to oblige you, Haldham," he said, "but I am very much afraid that it cannot be done. I am advised—medically advised—that the fewer people about my nephew the better it will be for him at the present time. Isolation and complete seclusion are called for in his unhappy case. It seems that I unfortunately made a mistake in the first instance in bringing you here. Your mere proximity excites him—it has come to that. I need not say how sorry I am to have to mention this."

I nodded indifferently.

"In that case I will leave Charmingdene at once," I said. "There is plenty of time for me to catch the evening train."

I saw a quick look of relief come into his face as I said that, and with a formal word of farewell he turned away. But perplexity was the dominant feeling in my mind as I watched his retreating figure across the yard. What was to be done now? That I could not decide in a minute, but I was firmly determined not to go very far from Charmingdene. If Colonel Gravenall thought that by dismissing me, he could drive me away from the place and out of Cornwall he did not know his man. I had no intention of returning to London that evening, or of leaving that part of the world until I had seen this thing through. I had pledged my word to Eleanor to watch over her brother, and no power on earth—not even Death with his drum—should make me prove false to my word. With a heavy heart, I tried to form some plan to communicate with her, and to let her know that I had been sent away.

That point was happily settled for me in a manner I had not thought to expect—by a woman's wit, in fact. For as I was packing my suitcase in my room overhead, and considering the difficulty with anxious thought, my ear was caught by a faint, soft rustle on the steps below. Turning quickly, I saw a white fragment of paper showing half-way through one of the cracks of the trap-door. Crossing over

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to it, I picked up the paper and flung back the door. But there was no one in the garage underneath. Standing by the opening I unfolded the little note. It contained one line of writing, which ran:

I will be at The Oysters in half an hour's time. Destroy this.

I read and read the faint, hurriedly pencilled words, then lit a match and scrupulously burned the half sheet on which they were written. I lingered in my room a few minutes longer before descending the wooden steps for the last time, suitcase in hand. As I crossed the flagged yard I looked up at the house, and had a brief glimpse of a curtained window upstairs parted gently by a man's hand. The person watching for my departure must have seen my uplifted glance, for the hand was hurriedly withdrawn, and the curtain fell, screening the window as before.

Pondering this incident, I made my way to the side gate, and let myself out upon the white and empty road.

■ A WEAK sun peeped out from a leaden sky as I reached the toppling pillars of The Oysters and looked around me. Then my heart beat high as I discerned Eleanor, standing farther on by the Kissing Stones, out of sight of the house crouching at the foot of the hill. She saw me and came to meet me, her eyes lifted to mine.

"You are going away," she said, in a strange voice.

I nodded. "Your uncle told you, I suppose?"

"Yes," she said.

"And did he tell you why?"

She shook her head slightly, looking on the ground.

"It was not of my seeking," I said, a little bitterly, for I fancied I read her thoughts.

She caught her breath sharply, and made a quick gesture with her hands.

"Do you mean he has—sent you away?" she asked.

"Yes," I rejoined. "Not only that, but he told me I must leave Charmingdene at once."

There was relief in the look she gave me; relief, and (I hoped) something more.

"What did he tell you?" I asked.

"He merely said that you were leaving and returning to London by to-night's train." She hesitated, then went hurriedly on, "I wanted to thank you before you went for all you have done for my brother and—myself. That is why I asked you to meet me here."

"It will be time enough to thank me when I have really done something to help your brother," I said, with a smile. "You have not seen the last of me until then. Colonel Gravenall was wrong in one thing—I have no intention of going back to London just yet. It is my intention to stay here and see this thing through."

Her eyes dwelt on my face in a different manner now.

"I do not know what I should have done if you had not been here," she went on, in a moving tone. "If I could only tell you how much your help has meant! Edward and I have faced the long nights with fresh courage, knowing you were watching out there on the moors. If you had left us—if you had indeed gone away—I should have been, oh! so terribly afraid. . . ." Her voice faltered, and she looked across the moors.

"Your uncle has not got rid of me so easily as that," I answered, a trifle grimly. "He has dismissed me from Charmingdene, that is true. But I intend to continue my watch for your brother until I have found out what this mystery means."

She began to thank me very earnestly again, but I went on.

"I shall watch from the moors tonight as usual—from the hill behind Charmingdene, I am going now to find somewhere to stay—some place not very far off—and I shall return here as soon as it falls dark. As I mustn't be seen at the house again, will you tell me where I can see you, or hear hear from you, in case of need?"

"You could write to me at Charmingdene," she said simply.

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I shook my head promptly, my faculties at work.

"No," I said, "that would not do. A letter from me might be seen, and it will be better for people to think that I have gone back to London for good and all. In fact, I want you to promise that you will not even let your brother know that I am still here watching at night for him."

She gave me rather a wistful glance at that.

"Must I promise that?" she said. "It has helped him so much—the knowledge that you were listening for the drum on the moors. Since he has known this he has been able to sleep. Now—if he thinks you are gone—he will be as bad as ever again."

Pity for her inclined me to relent, but the thought of Colonel Gravenall braced me to be firm.

"I sympathize with you," I gently replied, "but I think it will be better so. Believe me, I am acting for the best. Will you promise me?"

"Yes," she said sadly; "if you still wish it."

"It will be wise, until we know more," I rejoined. "And now, as to messages between us. We had better arrange something easy and safe for both. You see that holed stone over there—the smallest of the kissing stones? I will put a note beneath it if I wish to see you, and you had better do the same for me."

She looked towards the stone and then at me, nodding her head.

"I will do just as you say," she said gravely. "I will slip up here every night and morning to see. And now I must go." She paused, then went on a little breathlessly, "Oh, how can I ever show my gratitude to you for staying here to help my brother and myself in this way? It helps ever so much. I don't know what to say or how to thank you."

"Don't!" I said. "It is a very little thing. But I ask you to remember that you can depend on me."

She smiled with tearful eyes, holding out her hand.

"I am not likely to forget it," she said softly. "Good-bye!" And the next moment she was gone.

I watched her down the hill until she vanished from my sight. Then I turned my back on The Oysters and kissing stones, and went on my way.

■ AS I pushed on through the heather, the thought of where I was to sleep that night began to trouble me.

In the course of half an hour's walking I came to another road at right angles to the one I was on, and the two made a white cross in the purple moors. I hesitated between them, wondering which way to turn. I could either go straight on or take the cross-road. As I could see no sign of a house ahead of me, the cross-road seemed the best. But which way—to the right or the left? To settle that point, I took one of Colonel Gravenall's half-crowns, and threw it aloft. "Tails, I turn to the right; heads, to the left!" I cried as it spun to the ground. It fell at my feet. The King's head shone from the disc in the dust. Some people disbelieve in luck, but that call turned out lucky for me.

I turned to the left on the cross-road, bound by this hazard of chance. By a long descent it took me down a steep and rugged hill. But again without sign of human habitation, the way being, if possible, lonelier than before. I kept on to the bottom, then struck uphill again. Before me the track twisted round the rise, like a road creeping out of sight. I pictured a night's shelter—a farmhouse at least—on the other side of the rise. Even in Cornwall one must reach houses somewhere.

I rounded the hill and the prospect seemed empty. Then in the distance I spied a small house on the roadside, which seemed to me like an inn. Unfortunately it was a good distance away. However, I set out towards it with a more cheerful heart, passing rapidly over the long, white dusty road. As I walked briskly along, my eyes fell on another and more unexpected sight—a stationary motor-car drawn into the hedge at the side of the road, with a half-hidden fig-

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ure of a man tinkering with the mechanism underneath.

"Can I be of any assistance?" I said, addressing him. "I understand a little of this make—"

The owner of the car swung around, and the remainder of my sentence was never finished. My eyes stared with pleasure and surprise at the sight of his face.

"Colwin Grey, by all that's wonderful!" I exclaimed. "Whatever are you doing in this part of the country?"

He smiled as we shook hands.

There was not much wrong with the car, when I came to examine it, and I soon had it in running order again. I worked determinedly, and when I had finished I wiped my hands with a piece of cotton waste. From the roadside Grey expressed his thanks.

"And where are you going, Haldham?" he asked. His shrewd glance took in my travel-stained attire and the shabby suitcase in my hand. I felt myself flushing a little beneath his eye.

"I am looking for a night's lodging, for one thing," I rather lamely said.

"Well, then, you had better come along and dine with me. I am stopping at Penzance for the night. It's strange running across you in this fashion, you know, because one of the things which brought me to Cornwall was to look for you."

"To look for me?" I echoed in astonishment.

"Yes; there has been rather a lucky turn of affairs in your late father's estate. It appears that one of his foreign speculations has turned out well, and there is a residue coming to you. Not a fortune, by any means, but a few thousands at least, and a few thousands are always acceptable at any time. I was asked to find you, but that proved more difficult than I thought. I traced you to your London lodgings but your landlady could tell me nothing beyond the fact that you had left there to go to Cornwall.

"That was vague; but as it happened I was motoring to the west of England on other business, so I decided to make inquiries as I came along—so far without success. I certainly didn't expect to come across you like this, wandering through Cornish moors with a suitcase in your hand. What have you been doing down here? However, never mind that now. Jump up and drive into Penzance with me."

I hesitated, and he saw it.

"What is the difficulty?" he asked. I looked at him, and made up my mind in a moment.

"Grey," I said by way of answer, "I want badly to talk to you. At the present moment I would value your advice and assistance more than anything else in the world. But in spite of that I cannot come with you now, because I have to be on these moors again before it grows dark."

He gave me a keen glance.

"If that is all," he said, "you can drive yourself back in my car. So you had better come. I thought when I saw your face that you looked like a man with a story to tell. Well, you can tell me as we go along, or defer it until dinner at the hotel—just as you please."

I did so, grateful to the toss of the coin which had turned my footsteps that way. (That half-crown is now a cherished possession of my wife's.) I saw in it a symbol—an augury—of my case; for in all England just then Colwin Grey was the man I would have most wished to see, had I been offered the choice. He was a solicitor when I first knew him in my own legal days, but much more, even then, than that. Since then his name has become familiar to most people in the more sensational and popular rôle of a famous private investigator of crime. I came to know him intimately in the course of the Heredith case, for the Herediths and our family were friends, and his wonderful elucidation of that grim and ghastly tragedy made a lasting impression on my mind. His face was keen and pale as of old, and there was the same look in his wonderful grey eyes: inscrutable, but with something indulgent and compassionate in their depths—the understanding glance of one to whom so many human foibles

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and follies had been unveiled. Altogether, I felt it was good to have him there. My perplexities seemed to lighten by his mere presence in the car.

His car made quick work of the few miles to Penzance, and soon we were sweeping along within sight of Mount's Bay. When we reached the hotel on the front he ordered a meal to be served without delay. We dined in a private sitting-room looking out upon St. Michael's Mount and the sea. When we had finished Colwin Grey turned to me.

"Now for your story, Haldham, as you wish to return to the moors by dark."

■ I STARTED at the outset of my adventure, and told him everything from beginning to end—

"Oh, this is most interesting!" he exclaimed. "Now what do you propose to do?"

I told him simply I intended to watch on the moors by Charmingdene in pursuance of my promise, listening for the beat of the drum. He nodded understandingly. "And if you hear it—what then?"

I said in that case it was my intention to go in pursuit. He nodded again, but this time with a rather dubious air. Once more there was a period of thoughtful silence before he next spoke.

"What did the beating of the drum sound like to you, when you heard it from your room at the back of the house two nights ago? I want you to describe it very carefully to me."

"At first it was a faint and distant tap," I said, "just audible in the darkness, and that was all. The tapping seemed to come at intervals then. After a while it grew louder, in a kind of continuous and muffled roll, as though the drum was approaching the house. Then, suddenly, it ceased. There was something indescribably weird and strange about the sound in the dark. It seemed to transport one out of England—into the African jungle, or more mystical East."

He heard me thoughtfully.

"Some Eastern nations—the Arabs, for instance—have strange notions of death which bear an affinity to this fancy of the beating drum," he said. "But the idea of Death stalking the English country at night like a phantom Arab on a spectral camel is altogether too Eastern a conception for a sober and matter-of-fact land like ours. In this overcrowded island, Death is more like a car of Juggernaut, for ever crushing victims beneath its wheels. Death comes for all of us in time, but not with the beating of drums. We must look for a more human explanation of this, Haldham."

"Perhaps I can help a little here," I said. "My late employer, Colonel Gravenall, knows something of the matter, as I believe. We might do worse than seek the solution there."

Colwin Grey glanced at me.

"Why do you suspect him?" he asked.

"Well," I said, after some hesitation, "there seems no other explanation to me. In the first place, the drum-beating happened while he was supposed to be in London, but I doubt if he went there at all. Or he may have returned sooner than supposed, so as to carry out this scheme while the members of his household thought he was still away. Through being lost on the moors I was brought into this strange mystery, and the unfortunate Edward Chesworth's story was told to me. I promised to help him, and keep a watch on the moors. On coming to Charmingdene, Colonel Gravenall must have heard of this, and so he discharged me immediately in order to get me out of the way. Surely that is proof enough, don't you think?"

My companion carefully selected another cigar.

"Proof of what?" he asked.

"Proof that Colonel Gravenall is seeking to destroy his nephew in some mysterious and horrible way," I returned. "I do not know what his object is, but that much seems clear to me. When I first came to Charmingdene he sought to placate me—to throw dust in my eyes—by inviting me to dinner and talking with me confidentially at St. Just. But when he found there was a danger of my discovering too much, he discharged me."

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Grey pulled at his cigar musingly.

"That invitation to dinner may have been a genuinely friendly act," he replied—"the impulse of a man of breeding who finds he has a likeable man in his employ. On the other hand, it may mean what you say. But why did he engage you at all, in that case? Let us keep an eye on the colonel, but not to the extent of allowing ourselves to be prejudiced against him because you happen to have a dislike to him."

I REALIZED the justice of his words, and agreed with a smile. He spoke again:

"And now, Haldham, for another figure in the case. The medical attendant—this doctor who talked with you on suggestionism. What is his name?"

"Penhryn—Dr. Penhryn."

"Penhryn? Ah, a Cornish name. You say that he visited Charmingdene every day?"

"Practically, he did. I think there was only one day he missed."

"And he used to stay a long time?"

"Yes; and sometimes until far into the night."

"Rather an unusual thing for a medical man to do. He must have been very attentive indeed. You don't suspect him in any way, do you?"

"Why, no," I returned, with a smile. "Miss Chesworth and her unfortunate brother look upon him in the light of a friend. Edward Chesworth used to cling to him in his bad turns—his sister told me that. That accounts for him stopping so late at night. He is a very unusual type of man—not at all like a mere country practitioner."

Grey changed the topic abruptly.

"How many servants do they keep at Charmingdene?"

"Only one; a working housekeeper, who is very deaf."

Grey seemed to have no more questions to put. For some minutes he sat wrapped in brooding silence, like a man in intense thought. At last he raised his head and looked at me.

"Haldham," he said, "this is a sinister business, and it goes very deep. But I fancy I see . . . a light. And now, to settle what remains. Will you be guided entirely by me, and leave this affair in my hands?"

"Yes," I rejoined promptly; "only too gladly, Grey. I will do whatever you wish."

"Very well," he replied. "In the first place, then, you must not return to the moors to-night. It is unnecessary, because you will not hear the drum of death if you do. I have come to the conclusion that at least one night more will elapse before it sounds again. That, however, is only part of my reason for asking you to stay away. I have something more important for you to do, and tonight I must be left to handle this mystery alone."

In spite of my promise to obey him, I uttered a dismayed protest.

"But I promised Miss Chesworth!" I said. "She thinks I will be watching on the moors. How can I break my word?"

"Because I will be watching for you," he replied. "Haldham," he continued, with the same impressive note in his voice, "in all this you must consent to be guided blindly by me. This is a sinister and strange affair, and we must leave nothing to chance. When I have finished what I have to tell you, I want you to walk to the station, carrying your suitcase, and catch the night train to London."

"To London?" I exclaimed in astonishment. "But, Grey, whatever for? I am not going back to London."

"I know you are not," he rejoined. "Nevertheless, you will do as I say. And, what is more to the purpose, you will make inquiries at the ticket office as if you were going to London, and purchase a ticket for the whole of the way. The precaution may not be necessary; on the other hand, it may help us a lot. After leaving Penzance the express makes its first and only stop in Cornwall twenty miles or so up the line. There you will alight, and put up at the hotel for the night. In the morning I will drive over for you in my car."

I did not in the least understand anything of this, but I felt such unquestion-

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ing trust in Grey that I was quite content to leave matter in his hands. So I nodded, and said I would do as he wished. He glanced at his watch, then looked at me.

"You must start in a minute or two. I have just two more questions to put. Tell me what Colonel Gravenall is like."

"Tall and thin, with a liverish brown skin and glittering eyes," I promptly replied; "a typical Anglo-Indian, with an old Indian army officer's arrogant, superior air."

"And Dr. Penhryn?"

"Grey-eyed and clean-shaven, with a face of great strength and the torso of a giant, but he falls away in the legs. A giant on dwarf's legs, in fact."

"Thanks!" said Grey with a smile. "You have a gift for compact description, Haldham. I could recognize either of your men in a crowd. Unfortunately, you cannot supply me with a description of the leading personage in this drama."

"The leading personage?" I echoed, in a puzzled tone. "Do you mean Edward Chesworth? Because if so—"

"No, no," he interposed. "Young Chesworth is more in the nature of a victim in this affair than the principal figure on the stage. I was thinking of Death, Haldham—the mythical figure of Death with a drum. Whatever Death's anatomical structure may be," he went on gravely, "he is not likely to be dwarfish in the legs. Death would never cover the ground of his day's work, depend upon it, if that were so. And now, Haldham, I think you had better be off. You have very few minutes to spare to catch your train, and I have some important things to do."

We rose to our feet. In the corridor of the hotel Grey shook hands with me, and as he did so slipped a card into my palm. "Look at it in the train," he said as he turned away.

I walked along the front to the station, and reached it, as Grey said, in ample time to get on the train.

As the station began to slide away from me I thought of the card Grey had given me, and brought it forth. Holding it in my hand I scanned it by the light of the smoky carriage lamp. It was a few words in the nature of a reminder, and merely read:

The name of your station is St. Odd.

Chapter 8

THE SECOND COMING OF THE DRUM

■ ST. ODD was a small grey town with one twisted street of huddled buildings set in a circle of brown hills. The train stopped at the wretched station just long enough for me to alight, and then vanished with a dismal roar into a tunnel before I had passed through the barrier.

With a hard stare at my surrendered ticket to London, the porter who collected it listened to my inquiry and directed me to the hotel. It was some way down the twisted street, next to a picture palace and opposite a mission hall—a little more imposing than a village inn, but quite as unclean. A dark-eyed Cornish landlady with a beard said she could give me a room, but she stared at my request nevertheless, as though puzzled at the sight of a visitor in St. Odd at that time of night.

She sent for a chambermaid to show me upstairs, and after an hour's walk up and down the one street of the little town (though there was nothing to see there) I returned to my dingy room and to bed. I lay awake for a while wondering what was happening at Charmingdene, but finally dropped off to sleep with the comforting reflection that this mysterious affair was in far more satisfactory hands than my own.

Nevertheless I was anxious to see Colwin Grey the following morning, and after an indifferent breakfast in the coffee-room I sat impatiently awaiting his arrival, endeavouring to kill time with the current number of the *St. Odd Gazette*. I had read the bits of local news and the advertisements several times over, when the door opened and Grey walked in. His greeting was calm

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and his face inscrutable as ever, but something told me that he had important information to impart. My lips framed an eager question, but he shook a warning head.

"Not here, Haldham," he interposed quickly; "let us go outside."

We went out into the unsightly street. Not until we were beyond it, and in a secluded part of the hills, did my companion unclose his lips to speak of the events of the night.

"I stayed up late," he began briefly, "but Death did not parade. He is to come to-night instead."

His words thrilled me, few as they were, for they suggested that he had made discoveries in this terrible mystery. I looked at his face eagerly.

"You have found out something, then, Grey?" I asked.

"Everything!" was his unexpected retort. "I hope to clear up this uncanny mystery to-night. Listen attentively to me, Haldham, and I will tell you what we have to do. I have left my car in a garage at the outskirts of this town, and I want you to drive me by some remote and unfrequented way to the spot where you used to drive Edward Chesworth and his sister at night. There you will leave me, and take the car away—anywhere, so long as you give Charmingdene and the hamlet of St. Bree a wide berth. Keep yourself and the car well out of sight until about eight o'clock, then return without lights to the vicinity of Charmingdene, leaving the car on the moors somewhere where it cannot be seen."

"By The Oysters?" I suggested. "It would be out of sight there."

"Anywhere—so long as it is not too far from the hill behind Charmingdene. That is the important point. After leaving the car, I want you to mount to the hill behind the house, and listen for the beating of the drum. Should Eleanor Chesworth need you while you are out on the moors she will make the signal you arranged with her from the house."

My face expressed a wonder so complete that he smiled.

"I have seen her, of course," he said. "It was necessary, you see. So last night I left a note in your name at your ingenious post office, asking her to meet me by The Oysters, and she was waiting when I went there this morning. She was alarmed and surprised at the sight of me, but I told her that I had come in your place. She showed herself a brave and intelligent girl. I imparted all it was necessary for her to know, and she has promised to carry out my instructions to the letter. When the drum sounds to-night—as it will—she is to tell her brother that you and I are on the moors, and that he is quite safe. Should that assurance fail to calm him, and she finds herself unable to control him alone, she will raise the window-blind as a signal for you. If you see it, you will go quickly to her assistance, and, if necessary, restrain Edward Chesworth by force. He must not be permitted to go out of the house. Stay at Charmingdene until it is safe to leave him, then walk to the place where you have left the car. Drive slowly and quietly, without lights, to the finger-post where the road ends by the cliff. There, wait until I come."

There was much in these directions that was mysterious, and I would have liked to ask what they meant. But I knew by my friend's face that it would be useless to question him just then. So I merely answered that I would do exactly as he wished. He nodded his satisfaction, and said we had better go to the garage for the car.

ON THE journey across the moors to the cliffs he was unusually silent, even for him. I took him by a roundabout route as he requested—through St. Burian and Sennen, then along the grim and wild coast to the north of Land's End. When we reached the black line of cliffs where the closed road ended, I slowed down and pulled up the car. From the seat I pointed out the landmarks: the crooked finger-post, the dropping road, and the hut where I had spent the night. Grey silently observed them in turn.

"How long would it take to reach the

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mining hut from Charmingdene, walking across the moors?" he asked.

I said I thought a good walker might accomplish it in an hour and a half—perhaps a trifle less.

"But the distance is four times longer by road?"

I nodded. "Yes, it is quite twenty miles. The road winds around like a snake."

"Drive across the moors a little farther," he said—"out of sight of the road."

I went on until the road and the hut and the finger-post were no longer in sight. Then Grey asked me to stop the car, and when I had done so he got down.

"Haldham," he said, looking up at me from the roadside, "here is my last word. When you drive along the cliff road in the darkness to-night, keep a sharp look out for any figure you may see, whether afoot or in a car. Should you meet it, bring it back to the cliffs in the car. But I don't think you will encounter it."

I heard this like one completely at sea.

"Who would it be—this figure?" I ventured to ask.

"Death," was the enigmatic reply. At my bewilderment Grey gave a faint smile. "Haldham," he said, "these matters shall be made clear to-night; I promise you that. Till then, good-bye, and be sure and keep yourself out of sight."

With these parting words he set off, making his way back along the cliffs in the direction of the old St. Bree mine. I watched his tall figure until the rocks hid him from sight, then went on myself in the car. Bearing Grey's instructions in mind, I kept to the lonely road which skirted the cliffs, past Cape Cornwall and the savage headland of Botallack, and so on through Morvah and Zennor in the north. My first thought was to stop at St. Ives for lunch, but I decided to go farther afield.

Darkness had fallen on my familiar moors when I beheld them again, approaching them, after a long day's drive, from the south. When The Oysters and the Kissing Stones loomed out in the distance, I extinguished my lights, and took the car gently across the heather in the direction of the great twin piles of stones. As I thought, they made a capital place of concealment, though the night was so dark that the unlighted car could not have been seen ten feet away. But who was likely to walk the moors looking for an empty car?

Leaving it there, I made my way by a wide detour towards the hill. As I walked, I saw the shadowy outline of Charmingdene in the hollow beneath, one shuttered window showing a faint ray of light. At length I found myself on the hill behind the garage: the summit from where I had seen Colonel Gravenall survey the surrounding country with his glass. Here was my station for the night—to listen for the coming of the drum.

The west wind sighed in a cold sky, and the night was darker on the moors than down by the Kissing Stones. The air was sharp, but for shelter I had the drooping branches of the hill's one tree.

I stood still for a while, staring around me in the gloom. The stillness was absolute; not a whisper, not a sound. Yet Grey was certain I should hear the drum during the night. My eyes turned downward towards the darkened house, and I wondered if the one faint light I had seen came from Edward Chesworth's room. I could not see it now; the house appeared quite dark. I pictured that unhappy man crouching somewhere within, listening and starting with fear at some imaginary sound. And his sister? Was she with him, and perhaps thinking of me, watching—for her sake—in the darkness of the moors? Slowly I began to walk up and down near the tree in order to keep my circulation on the move. Excitement was in my heart, and perhaps a little fear as well.

TIME HUNG heavily as I waited, and for a long while no sound reached me in the stillness of the night. My mind was full of many thoughts, and I became conscious of a deep foreboding and horror, which settled upon my soul, and would not be shaken off. Across the darkness of the moors floated the sullen figure of Death, coming towards me, beating his horrible drum. He drew nearer, and I

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grew cold with fear. His burning eyes looked into mine, and I gave a loud cry. I woke to reality with a start, and my reason and my courage returned. Angrily I told myself that if I did not take hold of my nerves I would become a victim of the same hallucination that had wrecked young Chesworth's life. I was unworthy of Eleanor's trust, giving way to such fancies, like a nervous, hysterical fool.

Leaning against the tree, I sought to reason things out, and my late employer's share in it all. Why had he gone away, and why had he so mysteriously returned? What was his object in masquerading as Death—if indeed it was he, as I supposed? Or had this mystery a deeper, more sinister depth than that? These were questions I asked myself in great mental perplexity, with the feeling that the problem was one too awful to be solved, even by Colwin Grey himself. I wondered what he was doing just then, and if he was waiting by the cliffs in the lonely desert hut. Waiting—for what?

From these thoughts my mind returned to my surroundings. It was very quiet and still, and shadows thronged thickly beneath the tree. I had no idea of the flight of time, for I dared not strike a match to look at my watch. But the darkness around me grew deeper as the moments ebbed away, flowing about me like a tide. I seemed to behold dark waters rising noiselessly in a flood, seeking to encompass me like a black river of death. This new fancy gripped me with fear, and I stared before me as at a real source of peril. I actually had the sensation of standing in water, which flowed stealthily upward until my middle was passed. Upward it mounted, until the waters of the shadowy river touched my dry lips. The flavor was bitter indeed. It was the water of Death. . . .

I gave a violent start, staring above me into the thick and twisted branches of the tree. I was like a man roughly awakened from a bad dream, to find the reality worse than the thought. The waters of Death still seemed to be singing in my ears. Trembling and perplexed, my senses slowly came back. Gradually I became aware of myself and my surroundings—of the darkness, the wind sighing in the tree, and the faint outline of the empty moors. But none of these things brought me back to watchfulness. It was that other and more sinister sound which was the reason for my vigil there.

My first thought was that a dream still held me, because as I listened now I could hear no sound; though subconsciously my brain had registered it but a moment before. Then it came again; so softly as to be almost inaudible except to a tense listening ear; faint, indeed, but unmistakable—the rhythmic throbbing of a distant drum.

I listened with an effort. Far away in the darkness it sounded, though I had no idea of the direction from where it came. With a rise and fall the hollow cadence reached me, rolling faintly across the moors; tremulous, but unceasing, an unseen drummer beating a tattoo.

At first it seemed to approach no nearer. Certainly my ear for a long time could detect no difference in the dim, hollow sound. Then bit by bit the taps grew sharper and sharper and more distinct. I looked about me in the darkness, and still I could not tell whence it came. But I knew it was drawing closer now, and coming fast. I could even distinguish the rattle of bone or stick on parchment instead of the first faint muffled beat. Again I heard it more distinctly, and was able to locate it at last. The drum was crossing the moors near me in the direction of Charmingdene. It was climbing the slope of the hill to the tree where I stood on guard.

There was a thrill in that knowledge. I like to think I was able to behave with a semblance of courage and calm, even as the evil thing drew near. As I waited I wondered whether they had yet heard the drum in the house. It was possible that the sound was not yet audible to them, as it was to me, out on the open moors. Fervently I hoped that this was the case. The drum crept closer; nearer to the tree. I looked hastily towards the house. It was dark and silent, as it had been

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since the beginning of my lone watch.

But as the roll of the drum drew steadily nearer, and in the tense moment when I had gathered the whole strength of my being to confront it when it came, a loud cry rang out in the night. It came from the house beneath. Swinging round, I looked down the hill. At first I could see nothing, then suddenly, out of the gusty blackness, shone a white ray of light. It flashed like a beacon to me, up there on the hill. Once—twice—it came, as the blind of the upper window was swiftly lowered and raised. It was the signal agreed upon. Eleanor was in distress, and needed my aid. And at that moment the drum ceased. But I was not thinking of the drum just then. I raced at top speed down the hill.

Before I reached the house the back door opened, and a light gleamed forth. Silhouetted against its radiance stood Eleanor, looking out into the night. I went across the paved yard quickly, and stood before her in the patch of white light. Her dark eyes met mine thankfully, and together we went inside.

"You have come quickly," she said.

"As fast as I could," I said breathlessly. "What is it? What has happened? You heard the beating of the drum. Your brother—was he much afraid?"

"At first—yes," she answered. "That was why I signaled to you. But he grew calm again almost instantly when the sound of the drum ceased. I had to let him know that you were out there on guard. Mr. Grey said I might tell him as a last resource. It had such a wonderful effect on him; he seemed to grow calmer at once. But I must go back to him—I daren't leave him alone. Will you wait here for me? I will run down again."

I WAITED. The lamp threw a dim light on the kitchen, and it was very quiet there. Opposite me was a shut door—the door of Mrs. Truedick's room, I supposed. And no doubt she had slept through it all, like a woman shut in a grave—the grave of her unhappy infirmity. There was no fear of that horrible drum piercing her startled ear. And Colonel Gravenall? Where was he, and what was he doing just then? I looked about me. The lamp flickered and the shadows brooded. It was strangely silent, and the silence had an atmosphere of fear.

The hands of the clock crept forward. Nearly an hour passed away. Once I thought I heard footsteps moving overhead, and the sound of a subdued voice. Then through the aperture of the door a light glimmered faintly on the stairs. The door opened. On the threshold Eleanor stood, looking at me. Closing the door softly, she came forward to where I sat.

"It is all right," she said. "Edward is wonderfully calm. He feels quite safe with you and Mr. Grey watching over him, he says. I have not seen him so brave for a long while."

"That is good," I responded, "and now I will go. I am needed. Grey expects me. You can have every confidence in him."

She nodded, and gave me her hand.

"Go," she said simply. "I feel so safe, knowing you are both there. And tomorrow, Mr. Grey says, you will explain all."

She turned away quickly, leaving me alone. I walked across the kitchen and let myself out by the door. Over the heather I sped to The Oysters and the place where I had secreted the car. I cranked up, got in, and took the car carefully through the moorland to the white road.

The car with its lamps unlighted crept slowly seawards, following the dim track which wound and curved through the moors. I had thought of Grey's last instructions, and as the engine ran with subdued beat beneath my hand I watched the road ahead carefully for any figure or car coming in the opposite direction. But the way remained empty and still I could see nothing but the shrouded outline of the moors beneath an ebony sky. And as I threaded my way carefully in the darkness along the sinuosities of that tortuous road I brooded deeply over the events of the night, and wondered what had be-

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come of the phantom drummer with the drum. I knew that he had been near me —very near me indeed—when the cry came from the house. And it was then that the sound ceased. What did that mean?

Smoothly and almost in silence the car glided onward through the stillness of the night, and the road seemed to grow more dreary and empty as I came nearer to my journey's end. Along the way the remembered landmarks of the journey sprang up like beckoning ghosts, emerging from the darkness only to vanish instantly again. Then the apparition of a gaunt dead tree in a hedgerow warned me I was on the last rise. From it the road fell to the finger-post and ended abruptly near the cliffs and the waters of the bay.

The next moment the top of the hill brought into vision the bleak line of cliffs, and I heard the sullen, cold splash of the sea.

I heard something else too. A sound far more menacing and incredible, yet unmistakable and clear: the quick rata-plan of a drum. Loudly it throbbed through the darkness, from somewhere down by the sea. My hands gripped the wheel with excitement, and a chill of horror ran through my veins. Death—was Death waiting to confront me, advancing up from the sea with his drum? The car swerved dangerously across the road, but I got it around in time. I did not slacken speed. Pride and courage came to the rescue, and I kept straight on—though (I admit it) in a sweating agony of fear.

The last piece of road swam into vision —the steep declivity which ended in the finger-post where I was to pull up the car and wait. The drum sounded clearer than ever, as I let the car down the hill. I pictured the drummer by the finger-post waiting for me there. Then he seemed to rise from the road before me, swaying in the darkness with his beating drum. But as I drew near my destination I knew where the sound came from at last. It was making its way from the hut by the cliffs along the path which led towards the road. And as I pulled up by the finger-post my eyes sought the gloom underneath. In that evil moment I did not know what I might see.

As I looked, the figure of a man came bounding with great leaps up the path, the sound of the invisible drum pursuing him, as it seemed, from the rear. The man sprang up to the finger-post almost beside me, and I could hear his panting breath as he rushed past. Then he looked behind him and cried aloud. "Oh, God, have mercy!" he screamed, and "Oh, God!" again, with such a dreadful note of terror in his voice that I sat petrified in the car. Sometimes in the quiet of the night I awake with a start with that anguished shriek still echoing in my ears. The next moment I saw his fleeing figure crossing the road in front of the car. In that brief instant I knew him. It was Dr. Penhryn.

He went straight ahead, rushing like a man demented towards the high, black line of cliffs. "Stop!" I managed to shout warningly, but whether my voice reached him I shall never know. He ran on with incredible swiftness, flying like the wind. I lost sight of him momentarily, but saw him again on the brink of the cliff—a wild, gesticulating figure outlined against the sky. And then he was gone.

I sprang down from my seat and ran to the spot. From the edge of the cliff my eyes vainly searched the turbulent and inexorable sea. The next moment I heard footsteps behind me, and swung round to see Colwin Grey standing there. Our eyes met in silence. His face was white and stern.

"Useless to look, Haldham," he said slowly. "He could not live an instant in that sea, if, indeed, the life was not dashed out of him as he fell. My design was more effectual than I thought, but perhaps it is just as well. Yes; on the whole, I am inclined to think this is best. Come now, let us go. We can do no good here."

As we turned from the cliffs I saw Grey had something in his hand. It was a small drum. Seeing me looking at it, he raised his eyes and met my gaze.

"I picked this up," was all he said,

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and with a quick gesture cast it from him into the sea. Together we took our way to the car without further speech. When Grey got in he turned to me.

"Drive as quickly as you can to Dr. Penhryn's house," he said. "I will explain all to you there."

For answer I swung the car around. The next moment we were speeding along the dark road. At first the sound of the sea was loud in my ears. I was glad when we had left it behind.

■ IT WAS after midnight when we passed The Running Horse, and I took the car up the hill beyond the inn to Dr. Penhryn's door. Clouds were gathering in the west, and a lowering sky betokened a rising storm. The lonely house at which we stopped was wrapped in darkness and gloom. No light beaconed from it, but the sound of our footsteps on the gravel was greeted from within by the challenging, half-frightened yelp of a dog.

"It is useless knocking," my companion said. "Dr. Penhryn's daily servant went at nightfall, and he was accustomed to spend the evenings alone. We shall have to get in through a window."

I murmured a word of protest. Even if the man was dead, that seemed no justification for breaking into his house. But Grey brushed aside my scruples with an impatient air.

"It is necessary," he said. "I will take the responsibility, so you need not fear. But we are not in the least likely to be disturbed, for the village policeman lives five miles away. Besides, I have been in the house before."

His words surprised me more than ever, but I held my peace, and followed him meekly across the garden to the side of the house. Grey walked a step or two ahead until he reached a window. Then he stopped, and waited for me.

"I left this unfastened," he whispered in my ear. "Quietly, now, Haldham. I will get through first."

He thrust up the window as he spoke, then sprang on the ledge and clambered through. I followed suit, and we both stood in the darkness inside. Grey made his way across the room like a man who knew where he was. Then I heard him strike a match. It flickered in the gloom, and he lit a lamp which stood on the table. Lamp in hand, he beckoned me to follow him. He turned into the passage, and went up it to a further door. It was shut, and a faint whimpering and scratching came from within. I looked up at Grey with strained expectancy in my eyes.

"Only the dog," he explained with a smile. The door clicked as he opened it, and the whimpering changed to a snarl. Grey pushed the door wider. A small dog darted forth, and scurried away in the gloom of the passage like a mad thing. I heard its pattering feet rushing from room to room, followed by silence, as if the animal had leaped from the open window by which we had entered the house.

"The poor brute is half mad with fear, and I don't much wonder—in this house," said Grey. "Come, Haldham, let us go in."

We entered in silence. The room was in darkness but the remains of a dying fire still glowed in the grate.

Grey stood for a moment looking about him, then turned abruptly to me.

"Dr. Penhryn was really a remarkable scoundrel," he said.

My face showed my amazement, but I waited for more.

"Draw up that chair, Haldham, and I will explain it all," Grey said. "We are quite safe here. We are not likely to be interrupted—now."

He spoke with a gravity I had never heard from him before, then stood with downcast gaze in the lamplight, meditating awhile. I sat there in silence, wondering what strange story I was to hear. At length Grey sat down by my side and looked at me.

"Do you know anything of suggestion and auto-suggestion?" he said.

The question had been asked me in that room before, from the lips of the dead man. I answered in an almost similar way.

"Very little, beyond hearing a lecture

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about it in London a year or two ago. It was rather a fashionable cult just then. The papers took it up, and London women flocked to the lectures at which some foreign professor expounded its principles. It seemed rather a queer business to me—a mixture of faith healing and Christian Science, or something of that sort."

Grey smiled a little.

"No; it is not. In fact, it is quite a different thing. Its professors and followers claim it to be a science, though personally I should not call it that. And it is an interesting theory in some respects. It is based on the principle that the subconscious mind is the actual controlling force of the human entity, and not the will, from which suggestionists say the subconscious mind is quite distinct.

"They assert that the will—as we understand it—is the conscious and educated power of thought, but that the subconscious mind has a much more powerful influence over human actions, though we have little knowledge of how it works. The apostles of suggestion claim to be able to teach people how to direct and control the operations of this unknown force—the subconscious, as they call it, or the subconscious mind."

"I think I follow you," I said. "What do you think of it yourself? Undoubtedly the subconscious mind exists. But do you believe that it is a stronger force than the will—what you have described as the conscious trained power of thought?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I should not like to be dogmatic on the point. Indeed, dogmatism would be ridiculous in such an unknown domain. We can only advance theories, not facts. But I am inclined to agree that the subconscious mind is a very strong force. The textbooks of suggestion attempt to demonstrate its power by various tests. There is the elementary one of going to bed knowing that you have to catch an early morning train."

I nodded. "And you generally awake before the time."

"Quite so. That is supposed to be due to the subconscious mind prompting you to awake from sleep. Baudouin, in his work on suggestion, defines suggestion as 'the subconscious realization of an idea,' or 'the putting into operation, by ourselves or another, of the ideo-reflex which exists in us all.' In plain English, it comes to this: if there is anything in the theory, we are not governed by our wills, as is commonly supposed, but are swayed by suggestions from without, and by auto-suggestion from within."

He turned to the table and picked up one of the books lying there. "Listen to this," he said, and read aloud:

"These forces working upon the subconscious mind without rational guidance make us the weak, uncertain creatures we are, contradictory and unreliant, lacking continuty of purpose. The conscious or educated will is but a poor faculty after all. Very few people exist who can (in the expression) 'make up their minds' to a certain course of action, and then abide by it."

■ "THAT DISPOSES of the doctrine of free will, Haldham," said Grey, laying aside the book. "'I am the master of my fate' is a theory which found scant favour with the writer of those words."

"Who was he?" I asked.

"The unhappy being who went over the cliffs tonight," he gravely replied. "Wait!" he interposed in answer to my extreme look of surprise. "This goes much deeper than you think. The dead man's studies of the transcendental and the unknown—the unknowable, let us say—took him along a dark and dangerous road which none of us may tread. He was that most dangerous thing—a fanatical inquirer into the nature and essence of life, regardless of the cost. He sought to wrest from the darkness of the universe in which we walk those secrets of existence which we are not permitted to know. I made that discovery in this house last night—alone."

Grey went across to a closed writing cabinet in a corner of the room, and unlocked it with a small key. From a kind of secret drawer he extracted a bundle of

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documents, and a diary in a green leather cover, also locked. With these he returned to his seat.

"It took me some hours last night to go through these papers," he said. "The contents make interesting reading. Penhryn was unquestionably a man of commanding intellect. Had he approached his experiments in a proper spirit all might have been well, and the result very different. Listen again."

Turning the lamp higher, he read:

"There exists an underworld of mind of which we know nothing. Ah, to fathom its deeps, to understand what it means! The subconscious mind is the real soul of man, where our lives and destinies are shaped without our knowledge.

"Long years of investigation and research have convinced me that it is this force which controls us all from the cradle to the grave. The subconscious mind is pure spirit. It is not subject to material weakness. Its activity is unceasing, and it governs us while the body rests, and the so-called intellectual faculties are inert and asleep. The conscious and educated mind of man is but a sharpened monkey cleverness, a few phrases learned by rote; a few ounces of viscid greyness subject to disease and decay.

"The subconscious is the real mind of man: the immortal spirit within us which we have never striven to learn or understand. In our ignorance we follow the blind promptings of the material mind, which leads us to misery, illness, and death. There is an Eastern allegory that the gods made man immortal, but hid the place of his soul, leaving him to discover where it was. Actually this is no fable, but a scientific truth. When man discovers the secret of the subconscious, and how to use it aright, he will be master of his immortal soul and the dark universe in which he dwells."

"It strikes me as rather vague and rhapsodical," I said doubtfully, as Grey came to a pause. "And I'm not sure that I understand it. What does it all mean?"

"Wait!" said my friend gravely. "There is more—much more—to come." He read on:

"We are all the slaves of imagination, whether we think so or not. We will walk on a beam laid on the ground, but thrust out from a precipice—no! You will sleep comfortably in a strange room where a corpse hangs in a shut cupboard in a corner, so long as you do not know that the suicide is there. But if you open the door by chance in the night, terror will banish sleep and cause you to flee. That is suggestion: the suggestion of animal fear to your subconscious mind that the stiff and swinging corpse is an awful thing inimical to yourself; and the subconscious (which is you) prompts you to run away.

"I had a patient once who greatly feared to look upon an approaching train. One day he remained near the edge of the platform a little too long. His subconscious mind turned his fear into action, and toppled him beneath the wheels of the train.

"Instinctively some people shun the edge of high cliffs. Why? Because they are afraid. In that lies the explanation of many things. Fear and emotion are both qualities of the conscious mind, and they keep us in bondage all our lives. The emotions of love, pity, and compassion hold us in enervating bonds, and we are hag-ridden all our lives long by fear, anxiety, terror, worry, and care, and the prospect of illness and death in the end. Such qualities are the product of our conscious faculties, but it is the subconscious mind which acts upon them and brings about the result.

"Every suggestion received by the conscious mind undergoes transformation into reality through the action of the subconscious mind. Everything, that is, except thought, which is a deliberately conscious and artificial process. The subconscious acts best upon the ideas and unconscious impressions, for they sink into the depths of the human entity through the imagination, without the cognition of the conscious faculties. Sug-

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gestion has been well defined as an idea which subconsciously transforms itself into corresponding reality."

GREY PAUSED in his reading, looked up, and adjusted the lamp afresh. "Now we shall begin to see where all this is tending," he remarked, and went on reading:

"Undoubtedly these truths have been demonstrated very wonderfully in the case of E— C—. He was the subject of a remarkable external or communicated suggestion to begin with. Four days were missing from his life for which he could not account. An Inca priest or witch-doctor assured him that during those four days he was dead, and restored by some horrible magic to life. The sinister suggestion sank into the young man's being, and preyed upon him so after his return to his native land that it seriously undermined his health.

"Here was a complete demonstration of the incalculable power of suggestion upon the subconscious mind. It was at this stage of the case that I was called in as a medical man. When I heard the nature of the patient's illness I saw in it a priceless opportunity for the experiment of the ultimate effect of suggestion upon the human soul. I resolved to take it. The ground was tilled, as it were. It was only necessary to continue the process of suggestion until the witch-doctor's assurance became an unalterable belief. A great curiosity came to me to test, as it were, the power of the subconscious to complete *and carry out to its logical conclusion* an idea which had germinated deeply within it.

"E— C— was told by the witch-doctor that he had been drowned, and that he was only restored to life upon certain conditions. The penalty of violation was awful and horrible in the extreme. The dread that this penalty might overtake him, or that he might bring it about by an involuntary encounter with some person he had met during the period of his episode abroad, brought the beginning of physical decay upon his health, and caused a deep-seated terror of mind.

"This in itself was striking proof of the influence of suggestion, which is indeed the supreme governing power of the human soul, whether we believe in it or not. Suggestion! It influences every act in our life. As Baudouin points out, laying the cloth for dinner makes one feel hungry, the sight of a fire just lit lessens the feeling of cold, the spectacle of an accident makes us shudder, not from sympathy, as is generally supposed, but because the idea is conveyed to us that it might have been our lot, and our quivering fibres shrink involuntarily from fear.

"People still wear amulets and charms against the power of evil, anti-rheumatic rings, lucky stones, and the like. Modern women buy mascots in jewelery shops for luck. What are such things but an unconscious belief in the power of counter-suggestion against evil suggestion? When I was out in Africa I treated a native of Uganda who was brought to me in an extremity declaring he had been bitten by a deadly venomous swamp snake. He had all the symptoms of acute poisoning: swelling, vertigo, sickness, and a very faint pulse. But actually he had not been bitten at all; it was merely imagination on his part. I assured him of that, and his recovery was rapid. Had I allowed him to remain in his belief he would have died.

"Imagination and suggestion! These two qualtities govern us all. Even as children we are influenced by them from the first. Coué gives the instance of a child actually hurting its hand, and suffering physical pain. The mother blows on the sore place and kisses it, and tells him it doesn't hurt any more. The child stops crying and goes on with its play. He believes there is no more pain; his unconscious mind accepts the suggestion and causes it to cease. And it is the same in older years. The recreations of life—*books, theatres, cinemas, music, and even* games—what are they but suggestions which convey new impressions to us? And modern addiction to drugs and patent medicines is another proof of the power of suggestion upon the subconscious mind.

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"Death often comes as the result of suggestion, because the fear of it works upon our subconscious and brings about swift physical decay. Suggestion, again, has such a potent effect upon our thoughts of old age and death that the majority of us die before our time. Imbued in every one of us is the belief that three-score years and ten is the allotted span of human life. Our forefathers blindly accepted this fable from the Old Testament, and they have passed it on to us.

"But modern science knows that the human body is capable of retaining life for a much longer period than seventy years. A new generation brought up in ignorance of all knowledge of the average duration of human life could by suggestion double the span of life upon this earth. And the use of suggestion could be made equally potent against disease. Suggestion and autosuggestion, if properly applied, will cure any organic disease in the human frame. It is all a question of setting the subconscious to work."

"Oh, come," I broke in suddenly, "this is going too far. I do not believe that."

Grey laid down the notes from which he had been reading.

"It would be useless to try suggestion in your case, then, because you have already put down the counter-suggestion of unbelief."

"You mean that I have no faith?" I asked.

"It is more a question of scientific belief in certain fixed principles upon which the human frame is governed than a matter of faith—so suggestionists say. But I think we have had enough of Dr. Penhryn's notes. They are merely the preamble. I wished to give you an outline of the drift of his arguments and the trend of his mind before reading to you the record of a series of terrible experiments he practised upon our unhappy young friend at Charmingdene while acting as medical adviser to him.

"That, to my mind, is the worst aspect of the case. It was because of the implicit trust reposed in him as a doctor that he was able to pursue his ghastly efforts to pry into the mystery of life and death at the expense of his unfortunate victim's reason, and almost at the cost of his life. But his moral turpitude has recoiled upon his own head—let us not dwell upon it. He has left a complete account of his experiments in this secret locked diary, of which I have the key. It is more than a diary—it is the unveiling of a dark and dreadful experiment. I am going to read it to you. It makes clear the nature of all the mysterious events which have perplexed you so much."

Grey unlocked the book and drew his chair closer to the lamp. The shaded light fell upon his strong, clear-cut face, the books on the table, and the square green volume in his hand. I also drew nearer to the table as he started to read again.

Chapter 9

THE WEAVING OF THE THREADS

■ "IT WAS on the twenty-first of March of this year that I was first called to the home of this patient to treat him for extreme nervousness and general weakness. In this case I found a delusion or hallucination as to a curious experience which had befallen the patient while in Peru on an exploring expedition two years before. The patient was unable to rid his mind of a story told him by an Inca witch-doctor or priest that he had died once through drowning in a lake sacred to the Inca god of Death, and was certain to die again in an appalling manner if he did not rigidly observe certain conditions.

"The witch-doctor claimed to have obtained for him a renewal of life upon these terms. The fear that he might actually encounter death in person or meet some forbidden face he had seen in this so-called 'Valley of the Ghosts' was the delusion from which the patient suffered. This fixed foreboding *(idée fixe)* shadowed his conscious senses continually, and therefore became a strong and continual suggestion in itself.

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"Full particulars of the contributing causes to E— C—'s frame of mind are related *in extenso* in my private medical diary of cases for the year, together with notes marked one to seven and A to L in the same drawer of my cabinet.

"Thinking over the case when I returned home, I reflected that chance had placed in my hands the opportunity to test the truth of my metaphysical studies. In particular it gave me a long-coveted opening to investigate, at first hand, the elements of the subconscious mind. I told myself that I could now ascertain by experiment what the reversed effort of the will was, and what hidden law it actually followed.

"Those who profess suggestion claim for the subconscious unlimited powers of good, but my own feeling has always been that the reverse may be equally, and even more potently, true. Who is to say that the subconscious operates infallibly in one direction, and in a beneficial direction only? It seemed to me that this dark and potent power within us, which plays such a tremendous part in the mysterious duality of our existence, might be made an even more dreadful factor for the shipwreck of the human soul. If it could be reached with suggestions for good, why not equally so with ill? Could suggestion from without goad its blind strength into bringing about E— C—'s death? Could suggestion throw the subconscious into a state of brute panic, and cause it to overthrow everything, like a bolting horse?

"These were questions I had asked myself previously, with no means of finding out the reply. Now, in this case, I had the opportunity of drawing nearer to the truth. I determined right then to avail myself of it.

"Coué says that when the will and imagination are at war, imagination invariably gains the day. This is a profound and great truth. I observed it in the delusion of E— C—. The patient's reason and common sense struggled resolutely against the story of the witch-doctor as superstitious and benighted nonsense, but imagination was for ever carrying him back to his dreadful experience in that dark lake. My early experiments aimed not at weakening his will power, but rather to work upon his imagination by suggestions which would strengthen his lurking fancy that he was drowned (as the witch-doctor said) when taken from the lake, and was therefore a dead man restored to life, but only permitted to remain so by the ignorance or forgetfulness of Death.

"During my next few visits to the patient I carried out this phase of my experiment with methodical care. His imagination had been deeply excited by this strange episode of his life in the 'Valley of Ghosts,' and it was my first business to make him brood upon it more. With this object I made him tell me several times the story of his sojourn in the valley by the lake, and of his swim through the Waters of Death. With each repetition of the story I expressed my own wonder and amazement with increasing emphasis and belief. In this manner I strengthened his own belief and fear of the experience, and gradually destroyed the power of his conscious will to insist upon its absurdity, and thus quell the rising alarm of his subconscious mind.

"The time was not long in coming when I was able to carry my experiments to a further stage. Suggestions conveyed to the imagination had already reduced the quivering envelope of flesh known as E— C— to a state of cowering terror, through the panic communicated to his subconscious mind. But that was not enough. Concealed in his darkened bedroom he might have dragged out an isolated existence for years, like a cowering ghost in a tomb. This was but the beginning; I wanted to see the end. I wanted to ascertain whether the patient's conscious efforts toward self-preservation could be overthrown by the mad horror of the subconscious within. Therefore the second part of my experiment aimed towards whipping the madness of the subconscious into a frenzy sufficiently strong to destroy the being in which it dwelt.

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"When the conscious faculties are quiescent, the subconscious influences are nearer the surface of our being than at other times. Dreams are caused by the action of the subconscious within us while we sleep. While we sleep we are free from the strain of our waking anxieties, free from the thraldom of those qualities and faculties artificially cultivated to enable us to fight the battle of life. In sleep the waking tension is gone, and we are free to dream of life as we should wish it to be.

"It has been pointed out—by Baudouin, I think—that this is the reason why most people look younger and happier in their sleep. Our thought flows quicker in dreams; the subconscious soars free of the lower and earth-bound elements of the mind. The moment of sleep, then, favours the experiment of suggestion—is, indeed, the ideal time for it. In sleep (I again quote Baudouin) we set sail upon the waters of the inner world—that inner world which exists in every one of us. The subconscious is the pilot of our being then, and sometimes guides us into strange new worlds.

"I HAD carefully prepared the ground for this stage of the experiment, and had worked up to it by degrees. The friendly intimacy between the patient and myself was now an established thing. He looked forward to seeing me, and leaned on my company to a considerable extent. I spent long evenings with him, chatting with him, and teaching him chess. His sister thought such evenings were good for her brother—they cheered him, and rallied him out of himself. She was grateful to me for coming, and left us much to ourselves. At these times I never failed to turn our talk to a theme he was at once eager and reluctant to discuss. But under my promptings his imagination invariably overpowered the will, and he would relate his strange experience in that valley anew. When he had finished he would sit silent, staring moodily into vacancy, every detail of that weird and unaccountable passage in his life living afresh in his tortured brain. And then I would leave him, suggestion clawing his vitals, to sink deeper into his frightened subconscious through the long hours of darkness and sleep.

"The first phase of the experiment had succeeded beyond expectations. By a modified form of suggestion the patient in his subconscious mind believed that he had died in the lake, and owed his life upon conditions to the miraculous intervention of an old Inca priest. The next step was to test the power of the subconscious over being by implanting in the former the idea that Death was abroad and seeking for one who had escaped him before.

"How was this to be done? After thinking it over I decided to bring a more significant form of suggestion into play. I thought of the symbol by which the coming of Death was to be known.

"Strange how nearly all aboriginal peoples attached a mysterious significance to the monkey's paw! With them it is a totem, or religious symbol, probably based on the simian affinity with man. I observed this first in Africa, when studying native psychology and religious customs there. It happened rather fortunately by my experiments that this was so. For, looking among the curios I had brought back from Africa, I found such a token—a dried monkey's paw—thrown with other forgotten odds and ends in a box. It was given to me in the first instance by a Uganda witch-doctor, who assured me that while I kept it, I should never come to harm. But with the Incas, apparently, its possession means death.

"One night I made the dusty, forgotten fragment into a package with native string, and carried it secretly in the darkness to my patient's lonely home on the moors. I left it at the door and departed swiftly, after sounding one loud single knock.

"The subconscious mind has been defined as a storehouse of memories. Here, at least, was a tangible memory upon which it could work. It was completely effectual, as I expected it to be. When next I saw the patient he had greatly changed for the worse. In terror he pro-

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duced the paw for my inspection, staring at it with horrified eyes. Indeed, his whole attitude was one of deadly terror, as he told me, like one who sees the moving finger of doom before him on the wall.

"The final moment of the experiment was at hand. It now only remained for me to test how the subconscious would act under the apprehension of the approach and near presence of Death *in propriâ personâ*. In such a crisis would the *conscious* human instinct of self-preservation prevail, or would the blind inward force of subconsciousness, shaken to the roots by the deadliest fear, destroy itself and the being in which it lived? That was an interesting speculation indeed, and I looked forward with the utmost impatience to the proof.

"The last potent test I determined to apply during slumber; or, to speak more accurately, at a moment when the patient, for the purpose, had been partially aroused from sleep. The sensation of a sharp interruption of slumber is familiar to every one. The sleeper returns to consciousness with a bewildered start, without knowledge of his surroundings or environment, and not infrequently with a sensation of fear. This is another proof of the dominance of the subconscious in sleep, and of how far we are carried by it into the region of a different world of dreams. Unfortunately we bring back with us no record of this other world, or of the experiences which befall us there. Sometimes we retain the dim fragment of a so-called dream, but nothing more. The known world of our consciousness resumes its sway over us at the moment that we begin to awake.

"But if one awakened to a renewed impression of the hidden revelation of the subconscious in slumber, what then? In sleep the subconscious unveils the unknown to us, but the prompt resumption of control by the conscious faculties at the moment of awakening prevents us from glimpsing what these revelations may mean. But if, when sleep was departing, those vanishing revelations were prolonged and held captive by suggestions from without, what was likely to be the result? It meant (as I profoundly hoped) an advance upon that dark road where every scientific observer is bound—the quest for the ultimate truth. The soul of my patient, in the moment of its dread unveiling, might reveal the great mystery to my eyes.

"FOR THE purpose of this final test it was necessary for me to spend the night at my patient's house. Fortunately there was no difficulty about this. The patient's uncle and sister were only too glad to have me there after one of the young man's bad turns, and the patient at such times clung to me. So I passed the evening quietly talking with him in his room. We did not play chess.

"By this time he had grown too mentally weak to concentrate upon the game, and since the coming of the sign his nervousness would not allow him to think much of any other thing. All the night he talked of nothing else, and my share of the conversation was devoted to heightening his fears in every way. Together we speculated upon (or at least I did not deny) the prospect of the early appearance of Death, and what measures of safety should be taken when there sounded the beating of the drum.

"This conversation made E—— C—— a prey to dreadful apprehension. He sat there with white face staring at shadows, starting in an agony at every chance sound. When I deemed his subconscious weighted with terror sufficiently, I persuaded him to go to bed. As soon as he was beneath the bedclothes I administered a strong sedative of bromide of potassium. The effect relaxed his nervous tension sufficiently to permit him to sleep.

"He was in the half-conscious state I needed for my purpose. Bending closer to him I breathed in his ear:

" 'Death is near you, thou erring one.'

" 'Death!' My ear caught the faint echoing whisper, and that was all. Then he gave a kind of fluttering sigh, but did not awake, although I could feel his heart beating more rapidly.

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"'Ai-ie! Death, Nogul, though he is not yet here. But I have come to warn you as I promised, Nogul—even Munyeru, who sent unto you the sign of the paw. And it is given to Munyeru to tell you that at this hour tomorrow night your ears shall hear the beat of Death's drum.

"'Tell me, Munyeru, tell me quickly' —I could catch the passionate note of pleading in the sleeper's whispered breath —'tell me if there is not some way of escape?'

"'It is not permitted me to know,' I replied, in my assumed part. 'But it is possible to avert it for the present—yes. More than that I cannot say.'

"'And how am I to avert it, Munyeru?'

"'You must do what I tell you, Nogul. When you first hear the drum advancing in the night toward this house, arise instantly and dress yourself, and under cover of the darkness walk across the moors, to the old mining hut which stands near the promontory by the sea. There conceal yourself until the search of Death is done, and the next day you may return to your home.

"'But be watchful and alert, my son, for the Swift-footed One is not lightly mocked or deceived, and though this time you escape him, yet will he come again. On the next occasion it may not be so easy to hoodwink him, but before the Dark One pays his second visit I will warn you, Nogul, and again tell you what to do. Be sure that you have understood me this time. Nogul. Repeat to me what I would have you do.'

"'I am to rise and dress myself when I hear Death's drum, and go across the moors in the darkness to the deserted mining hut by the sea. There I am to conceal myself until Death's search is over, and in the daytime I may return home.'

"The words came from the bed faintly, and with a mechanical utterance, like that of a child who is repeating a lesson by rote.

"'It is well,' I answered solemnly. 'Do this when the time comes, and you shall be safe. And now good-night, my son. Sleep in safety, for nothing shall harm you to-night.'

"'Good-night, Munyeru,' he murmured in a drowsy tone.

"The deep slumber which fell upon him as he uttered these words was proof of the mastery of the subconscious over the body when unhampered by the conscious will. My assurance of safety had penetrated to the subconscious with an almost instantaneous effect. The sleep lasted until after dawn, when the patient awoke wonderfully rested, but in rather a thoughtful mood. Whether any fragment of our overnight conversation remained in his conscious faculties in the guise of a dream I cannot tell, and he did not say. I took my leave of him with encouraging words, and went home to await the coming of the night.

"About ten o'clock I set out from home clad in a long coat, beneath which I carried a native drum, which was among the objects I had brought back from Uganda. Crossing the moors rapidly until I reached a most desolate part, I started beating the drum at the foot of a long hill which looks down on the patient's home. Up I went slowly, beating the drum as I went. I topped the hill and began the descent, sounding the drum step by step.

"I beheld the house at first silent and dark, then events happened at great speed. Lights flashed from the upper window, and a cry came forth. There came a clattering from the loft above the garage, as if someone was stirring within. I stopped beating instantly, and stood still. I was not afraid of being seen, for the night was of the gloomiest kind, and it was impossible to see anything a short distance away. But my heart leaped to my mouth at the sound of footsteps rushing by. Dark as the night was, I beheld that figure as it went fleeing fearfully into the darkness of the moors, one arm upflung as though to shield the eyes from the dread spectacle they feared to behold.

* * *

"So far, the subconscious mind had responded wonderfully to every test that

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had been applied. And now the way was clear for the last great test of all—to ascertain whether a blind obedience to suggestion would carry the subconscious to the length of destroying the body in which it was housed.

"I waited a few nights before administering suggestions to the patient for his final test. As before, I spent the night with him in his room. Again we talked of the lake, and of Death and his drum, and when I judged these thoughts had gone deep enough, I sent him to sleep, as before. Then, after he had slumbered a while I partly aroused him, and speaking as Munyeru in the darkness, warned him that Death with his beating drum was to search for him the following night. As fear reached the soul within him, I whispered the last suggestions in the following form:

" 'You will go to the hut of the deserted mine, Nogul, as before.'

" 'The hut of the deserted mine, as before,' his unconscious lips echoed in reply.

" 'But this time you will not hide yourself in it, Nogul,' I went on.

" 'What am I to do then, Munyeru?' his lips whispered again.

"In answer I spoke very slowly, for it was the crucial test:

" 'Instead of going upstairs to the attic, you will cast yourself into the waters of the pit.'

"There was a long silence, and I thought the sleeper gave a faint sigh. When at last words came from him they were uttered so faintly that I could scarcely hear.

" 'Why am I to do this thing, Munyeru?

" 'Because it is best for you, Nogul. Because there is no other way.'

" 'It is best for me . . . no other way. . . .'

"The sighing, broken echo of my own words reached me in the mere shadow of a whisper now.

I waited a moment before speaking the last word.

" 'Do you hear me, Nogul? Will you obey?'

" 'I hear you, Munyeru, and I shall obey you. . . .'

* * *

"And now, nothing remains except to put the experiment to the final proof. Have I succeeded? Can the blind force within us be schooled to leap forth and overpower our conscious faculties when these are awake and fully alert? I believe so, and I believe E— C— will at its behest spring headlong to his death tonight, in spite of any effort of the conscious faculties to stay his course. I say this because I believe that the subconscious in its own dark way dominates and controls the conscious mind. If this ends as I anticipate, what a discovery is mine! I shall have accomplished the first step towards unveiling the mystery of life and death on this mysterious world of ours. My next step will be in the direction of evoking the subconscious forth from the body alone. But let me first see the result of this. How eagerly I look forward to the coming night—

"THE NOTES end abruptly at this point," said my companion, laying down the leather book.

A silence fell between us, broken by the solemn ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. At that moment the same thought was in both our minds. It was Grey who put it into words.

"Perhaps it is as well the writer of these notes died in the way he did."

"Amen to that," I replied. "God grant the world does not hold another experimenter like him! I certainly owe Colonel Gravenall a complete apology for my groundless suspicions of him. But who could have guessed—who would have thought—"

"I'd not make the apology, if I were you," interposed my friend, in his quiet voice. "The less said about this extraordinary experiment the better for all concerned. Much of it had better remain a secret between ourselves. In fact, if it had not been set down here in the man's own hand, I should have heard the story with no very strong belief. But

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strange things are perpetrated in the name of science, Haldham! Let us charitably assume that a thirst for knowledge turned this Cornish doctor's brain."

"I can hardly believe all this yet," I said.

"It is an unpleasant subject to dwell upon," returned Grey. "Penhryn's victim has been subjected to a most horrible mental torture. Fortunately, he has been saved at the eleventh hour. Edward Chesworth owes a debt of gratitude to you—the debt of his life and reason."

"Why, Grey, how can you say that?" I asked with a look. "Edward Chesworth owes me nothing of the sort. From first to last he owes everything to you."

"It was really very simple, Haldham," Grey said, "once I had found the key. In this case the key was in what you told me of the works on suggestion in Dr. Penhryn's library. That gave me the idea.

"And Dr. Penhryn's fondness for works on suggestion and similar subjects determined me to examine his actions first. As I say, the analogy was there; a fondness for the transcendental and metaphysical suggests an unusual type of mind. Slight circumstances such as this often enable one to follow the windings of crime to their source. It was so in this case. It is merely a matter of a knowledge of human nature, after all. Thinking it over on these lines, I began to see —as I told you at Penzance—a light.

"After you left me to go to the station I set to work to find out something about the man. I soon learned all there was to know. Among other things I discovered that he had spent some years in Africa as medical official in some kind of Colonial service post. That was a chance piece of information which helped to make things a little more clear. A man who had been for some time in a place like Uganda struck me as one likely to have a fairly wide knowledge of witch-doctors, tom-toms, monkeys' paws, and that kind of thing. And, on looking up a biographical notice of him in a local work of reference which I found at the hotel, I ascertained that Dr. Penhryn, like most travelers, had written a book upon some of his experiences abroad."

"I didn't know that," I said in surprise.

"I fancy it would be news to other people as well," returned Grey. "I asked for a copy of the work at the local library that night. It was covered with dust, and uncut as well. I was the doctor's first reader—in Penzance, at least. Perhaps I made up for others' neglect by the closeness of my own perusal of the work. The book was a painstaking record of the manners, customs, and psychology of certain African tribes, illustrated with excellent photographs which Dr. Penhryn had taken himself. I read it with extreme interest. Penhryn was an anthropological and scientific observer of no little merit, and he had much to say on the native use of drums."

I looked at Grey with a quickened attention, but did not speak.

■ "YES, DRUMS," he went on thoughtfully, tapping with a paper-knife on the table like a drummer with a drumstick. "It was a subject which apparently possessed a fascination for him. At all events, he gives the subject of African drums and tom-toms a whole chapter to itself. He writes interestingly upon the meaning and symbolism of these instruments, and especially of the custom of sounding them in the forest at night. It was his custom to remain in the jungle and lie awake listening to their weird and muffled roll, wondering what its significance might be. He also explains the uses of drums made by witch-doctors. Probably it first put the thought of acting as Death's drum into Dr. Penhryn's head. But I am anticipating a little here. My first actual proof against the doctor was gained before you left for St. Odd. Indeed, it was to furnish me with that proof that I asked you to go. You'll remember that before you left I got you to describe him to me? When you reached the station I was there as well."

I heard this with a look of surprise. Grey continued.

"I went to see if Penhryn was there. If my suspicions of him were correct, I

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felt convinced that he would be. It was obvious to me when I first heard your story that the pledge of secrecy you extracted from Miss Chesworth upon leaving Charmingdene came too late.

"Naturally she or her brother had already, in all innocence, told the doctor they had confided in you and that you had proffered your help. You had no suspicion of Penhryn yourself; it was the colonel you wanted to guard against. But Penhryn immediately saw the danger of your continued presence at Charmingdene. You were a dangerous obstacle to the fulfilment of his plans, and he decided to have you out of the way.

"He must have brought Colonel Gravenall back from London by some specious telegram and persuaded him to discharge you; there can be little doubt of that. And when you were discharged he wanted to be sure that you returned to London, for had you remained in Cornwall it was clear proof that you were still on the watch."

Sudden enlightenment dawned upon me. "So that accounts for St. Odd and the ticket to London?" I said.

Grey gave a slight shrug.

"Yes, for I felt quite certain Penhryn would proceed with his experiments more freely and rapidly if he saw you in the train. I was right. From a place of concealment I observed him go through the barrier and walk quickly up the platform, scrutinizing the interior of the carriages as he went. When he saw you seated in an empty compartment, reading, he was satisfied, and immediately turned away, leaving the station as quickly as he could. I followed him through the barrier just in time to see him step into his small car outside, and drive off along the road which leads across the moors.

"I followed him in my own car at a safe distance, until I saw him drive past his own house and go on towards Charmingdene, as I supposed. Extinguishing the lights of my car, I left it upon the moors while I forced an entry into this place. Penhryn might have returned and found me there, but that was a risk I had to take. I did not fear it very much, nevertheless. If my reading of the case was correct, Penhryn needed another night with his unhappy patient at Charmingdene to prepare him by baleful 'suggestions' for the final beating of his sinister drum. And I was right in that conjecture, as we have seen.

"In this room I found his writing cabinet, which I managed without using force to unlock, and proceeded to examine its contents. In the secret drawer were these documents and the locked diary, which I opened and proceeded to read. In them the fantastic experiments of an unbalanced brain were set down in his hand, plain to read. And although I have read that strange confession with my own eyes, I remain incredulous still. Even now I ask myself if it can be true.

"After reading and replacing these extraordinary notes, I made further search of the house. At the bottom of a box of curios upstairs I found a small native tom-tom or drum. And with that symbol the proofs of his guilt were complete.

"I might have waited and confronted him with these things, but a moment's reflection persuaded me of the unwisdom of that. How far had he transgressed the law? In what way could the law lay hold upon him for what he had done? Without going into that question, I decided upon a better and surer way, which was to surprise him while he was engaged in his final design.

"After you left me yesterday I walked back across the cliffs to the old mining hut, and waited quietly in its vicinity until night. I had brought sandwiches and a flask, and the time passed quickly enough. I knew Dr. Penhryn would not come until late, but I feared Edward Chesworth might, and I did not wish to take any risk on that score. But the last stage of this bizarre affair worked out as planned—up to a point.

"ABOUT HALF-PAST ten I heard the throbbing of a motor car on the road to the cliff, and a few minutes later my ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps on the echoing rocks. It was Pen-

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hryn, coming to await the end of his uncanny experiment after beating the drum on the moors around Charmingdene. From the shadow of a rock I observed him picking his way with electric torch towards the entrance of the hut. He entered, moving softly, and by the light of the torch looked down into the waters of the pit. Then with a quick nervous gesture he threw the drum down on the floor. The next moment he came forth again, and retraced his steps swiftly across the rocks to the spot where he had left his car.

"Evidently he had forgotten or overlooked something, and I knew he would return to watch for the arrival of Edward Chesworth at the hut. The thought of the drum Penhryn had left inside the hut gave me the idea of beating it myself, just to see what effect it would have upon him. I slipped in through the open door, and by the light of my own torch picked up the drum. And there I stood in the dark, waiting for his return.

"At length I again heard the sound of footsteps on the rocks, and saw the moving disc of Penhryn's torch. The light shot clear of the rocks, and grew more bright and distinct as he approached the hut. Within, I stood motionless. As he came near, I gave the drum a few faint taps.

"He stopped instantly. I had one glimpse of his white face uplifted in startled consciousness. Then the torch he carried dropped clattering on the rocks, and fell with a faint splash into some hidden pool. In the darkness I could hear him panting hurriedly, like a man labouring for breath in fear. Strange that one who had devised such a deception should have no suspicion of a trick! I tapped the drum again. In that instant he seemed to lose his reason, and appeared to believe in Death's drum himself. He gave a loud cry, and fled across the rocks. I followed him. The rest you know. Penhryn deserved a lesson if ever man did, but I'm sorry it has ended like this."

I was silent. Indeed, at the moment I could not find anything to say. Long as I had known Colwin Grey, I was confounded at the swiftness and cleverness with which he had penetrated into the heart of this dark mystery, and surprised at my own blindness throughout the whole affair. But the latter feeling quickly passed. I was not Grey. Who else could have solved this strange problem but the man who sat opposite me, his head tilted slightly backwards, his clear-cut face pale and thoughtful in the white rays of the lamp? He looked up, and answered my glance with a rather fatigued smile. Then, with a look at his watch, he rose to his feet.

"Come, Haldham," he said, "we had better get back to Penzance. Dawn is not so very far away."

I rose to my feet also.

"How much are Edward Chesworth and his sister to be told of this?" I asked. "Will you tell them yourself?"

"No; that is a matter I will leave to you," he returned. "I must go back to town in the morning, now that I have found you. You can go and see them as soon as I have gone. I think you had better tell them everything, and set their minds at rest. But I do not think it will be wise to reveal the entire story to anyone else. It is something best forgotten."

"I feel sure you are right," I agreed thoughtfully. "But do you know, Grey, there is something about it that puzzles me even now. After making every allowance for Edward Chesworth, I cannot understand how he permitted himself to sink into such a pitiable state of fear."

"Well, I can," replied Grey gravely. "In fact, the wonder is that he did not actually die of fear. For months past the whole of his faculties, waking and sleeping, have been engrossed by a single sensation to the exclusion of all other things, and there can be no doubt that his experience in the 'Valley of Ghosts' was of a harrowing kind. At Charmingdene he was in a state of mind which suggestionists call 'fixation proper.' In other words, his obsession or delusion—call it whichever you will—dominated him without cessation."

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"Even in sleep?"

"Yes, even in sleep. He was in the mental state which suggestionists call autohypnosis. In plain words he was the victim of a fixed idea."

"I UNDERSTAND his fear better now," I said, after a pause. "Those missing days are really very curious. Can you account for them, Grey?"

'I cannot say. Of course it is possible that the Inca witch-doctor may have thrown him into a hypnotic sleep, or administered some powerful narcotic drug which would have the same effect."

"But would a witch-doctor be likely to understand hypnotism?"

Grey shrugged his shoulders.

"Who is to say? Braid is supposed to have been the first investigator, but it is possible it may have been practised in the ancient civilization of the Incas thousands of years ago. But leaving hypnotism out of it, it is quite certain that many of the priests and witch-doctors of aboriginal races have a complete knowledge of the influence of imagination upon the human mind.

"We are, every one of us, far more the slaves of our imagination than is commonly supposed. And imagination in the case of the great majority of the human race still remains a very crude and primitive thing.

"And now, Haldham, we must really go. The dawn is showing through the window."

As he bent over the table to turn out the lamp I asked him a final question.

"I suppose it is inconceivable that Edward Chesworth actually was dead during those four days?" I said.

"That also is possible—in imagination at least," he responded with his slow, luminous smile, and with that I had to be content.

* * *

I parted from Grey later at Penzance, and went back to St. Bree across the moors. As I walked I thought over all Grey had told me in the dead man's house the night before. That story was taking me back to Charmingdene to set the minds of Edward Chesworth and his sister at rest; and I exulted in the thought of seeing her again. A vision of her as I had seen her two afternoons before came to me just then. The wistfulness of her attitude, her last glance as she turned away in the grey solitude of the moors. . . . All that was in the past. Her brother was saved, her own peace of mind restored. It was my mission to tell her, and her alone. It was she who had trusted me. With her brother and uncle I was not concerned; they could hear the story—or as much of it as she chose to tell—from her lips. After telling her, I would be free to go to London and my own affairs. To what purpose should I go to Charmingdene again? And yet. . . .

The day was grey and chill, but grew slowly brighter as I walked. The air was still, and a faint sun shone fitfully in a paling sky. The upward sweep of the road brought me to the open heather which lay between St. Bree and Charmingdene. I saw the hamlet in the distance; the inn, the granite cross, and the quaint stone buildings of the little street. With a surer knowledge of my surroundings now, I took my way over the hills.

The afternoon was declining when I reached that remembered turn of the path where the valley spread out beneath. Across the moorland I saw the loose pinnacles of The Oysters, and the great holed stones on the intervening slopes. And there, by one of them, stood Eleanor.

I stopped, and looked at her. She was by the kissing stone where we had parted two days before, her head turned slightly in the direction of the invisible sea. I could see the clear outline of her profile, the sheen of dark hair beneath her hat. I was conscious of my deep love for her then. But I went forward slowly, and with hesitating steps.

I was close to her before she turned and saw me. Her eyes met mine with a smile as I approached.

"I have been waiting," she murmured. "I thought you would come."

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It has always been the prerogative of genius to batter on the portals of the Unknowable—and then thrust his soul into the crack, like the little Dutch boy, to keep the devil out. The satanic legends surrounding the unbelievable career of the great concertist, Paganini, leave little doubt that somewhere there is a window such as Erich Zann's, beyond which lies a world more terrible than imagination can grasp, where science dwindles to zero and incredible passions rage as winds in a vacuum. . . . Where? Why, on the Rue d'Auseil—which no one visits twice. . . .

The Music of Erich Zann

BY H. P. LOVECRAFT

I HAVE examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet have never again found the Rue d'Auseil. These maps have not been modern maps alone, for I know that names change. I have, on the contrary, delved deeply into all the antiquities of the place, and have personally explored every region, of whatever name, which could possibly answer to the street I knew as the Rue d'Auseil. But despite all I have done, it remains an humiliating fact that I cannot find the house, the street, or even the locality, where, during the last months of my impoverished life as a student of metaphysics at the university, I heard the music of Erich Zann.

That my memory is broken, I do not wonder; for my health, physical and mental, was gravely disturbed throughout the period of my residence in the Rue d'Auseil, and I recall that I took none of my few acquaintances there. But that I cannot find the place again is both singular and perplexing; for it was within a half-hour's walk of the university and was distinguished by peculiarities which could hardly be forgotten by anyone who had been there. I have never met a person who has seen the Rue d'Auseil.

The Rue d'Auseil lay across a dark river bordered by precipitous brick blear-windowed warehouses and spanned by a ponderous bridge of dark stone. It was always shadowy along that river, as if the smoke of neighboring factories shut out the sun perpetually. The river was also odorous with evil stenches which I have never smelled elsewhere, and which may some day help me to find it, since I should recognize them at once. Beyond the bridge were narrow cobbled streets with rails; and then came the ascent, at first gradual, but incredibly steep as the Rue d'Auseil was reached.

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I have never seen another street as narrow and steep as the Rue d'Auseil. It was almost a cliff, closed to all vehicles, consisting in several places of flights of steps, and ending at the top in a lofty ivied wall. Its paving was irregular, sometimes stone slabs, sometimes cobblestones, and sometimes bare earth with struggling greenish-grey vegetation. The houses were tall, peaked-roofed, incredibly old, and crazily leaning backward, forward, and sidewise. Occasionally an opposite pair, both leaning forward, almost met across the street like an arch; and certainly they kept most of the light from the ground below. There were a few overhead bridges from house to house across the street.

The inhabitants of that street impressed me peculiarly. At first I thought it was because they were all silent and reticent; but later decided it was because they were all very old. I do not know how I came to live on such a street, but I was not myself when I moved there. I had been living in many poor places, always evicted for want of money; until at last I came upon that tottering house in the Rue d'Auseil kept by the paralytic Blandot. It was the third house from the top of the street, and by far the tallest of them all.

My room was on the fifth story; the only inhabited room there, since the house was almost empty. On the night I arrived I heard strange music from the peaked garret overhead, and the next day asked old Blandot about it. He told me it was an old German viol-player, a strange dumb man who signed his name as Erich Zann, and who played evenings in a cheap theater orchestra; adding that Zann's desire to play in the night after his return from the theater was the reason he had chosen this lofty and isolated garret room, whose single gable window was the only point on the street from which one could look over the terminating wall at the declivity and panorama beyond.

Thereafter I heard Zann every night, and although he kept me awake, I was haunted by the weirdness of his music. Knowing little of the art myself, I was yet certain that none of his harmonies had any relation to music I had heard before; and concluded that he was a composer of highly original genius. The longer I listened, the more I was fascinated, until after a week I resolved to make the old man's acquaintance.

One night as he was returning from his work, I intercepted Zann in the hallway and told him that I would like to know him and be with him when he played. He was a small, lean, bent person, with shabby clothes, blue eyes, grotesque, satyr-like face, and nearly bald head; and at my first words seemed both angered and frightened. My obvious friendliness, however, finally melted him; and he grudgingly motioned me to follow him up the dark, creaking and rickety attic stairs.

His room, one of only two in the steeply pitched garret, was on the west side, toward the high wall that formed the upper end of the street. Its size was very great, and seemed the greater because of its extraordinary barrenness and neglect. Of furniture there was only a narrow iron bedstead, a dingy wash-stand, a small table, a large bookcase, an iron music-rack, and three old-fashioned chairs. Sheets of music were piled in disorder about the floor. Evidently Erich Zann's world of beauty lay in some far cosmos of the imagination.

Motioning me to sit down, the dumb man closed the door, turned the large wooden bolt, and lighted a candle to augment the one he had brought with him. He now removed his viol from its moth-eaten covering, and taking it, seated himself in the least uncomfortable of the chairs. He did not employ the music-rack, but, offering no choice and playing from memory, enchanted me for over an hour with strains I had never heard before; strains which must have been of his own devising. To describe their exact nature is impossible for one unversed in music. They were a kind of fugue, with recurrent passage of the most captivating quality, but to me were notable for the absence of any of the weird notes I had overhead from my room below on other occasions.

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■ THOSE HAUNTING notes I had remembered, and had often hummed and whistled inaccurately to myself, so when the player at length laid down his bow I asked him if he would render some of them. As I began my request the wrinkled satyrlike face lost the bored placidity it had possessed during the playing, and seemed to show the same curious mixture of anger and fright which I had noticed when first I accosted the old man. For a moment I was inclined to use persuasion, regarding rather lightly the whims of senility; and even tried to awaken my host's weirder mood by whistling a few of the strains to which I had listened the night before.

But I did not pursue this course for more than a moment; for when the dumb musician recognized the whistled air his face grew suddenly distorted with an expression wholly beyond analysis, and his long, cold, bony right hand reached out to stop my mouth and silence the crude imitation. As he did this he further demonstrated his eccentricity by casting a startled glance toward the lone curtained window, as if fearful of some intruder—a glance doubly absurd, since the garret stood high and inaccessible above all the adjacent roofs, this window being the only point on the steep street, as the concierge had told me, from which one could see over the wall at the summit.

The old man's glance brought Blandot's remark to my mind, and with a certain capriciousness I felt a wish to look out over the wide and dizzying panorama of moonlit roofs and city lights beyond the hilltop, which of all the dwellers in the Rue d'Auseil, only this crabbed musician could see. I moved toward the window and would have drawn aside the nondescript curtains, when with a frightened rage even greater than before, the dumb lodger was upon me again; this time motioning with his head toward the door as he nervously strove to drag me thither with both hands. Now thoroughly disgusted with my host, I ordered him to release me, and told him I would go at once. His clutch relaxed, and as he saw my disgust and offense, his own anger seemed to subside. He tightened his relaxing grip, but this time in a friendly manner, forcing me into a chair; then with an appearance of wistfulness crossing to the littered table, where he wrote many words with a pencil, in the labored French of a foreigner.

The note which he finally handed me was an appeal for tolerance and forgiveness. Zann said that he was old, lonely, and afflicted with strange fears and nervous disorders connected with his music and with other things. He had enjoyed my listening to his music, and wished I would come again and not mind his eccentricities. But he could not play to another his weird harmonies, and could not bear hearing them from another; nor could he bear having anything in his room touched by another. He had not known until our hallway conversation that I could overhear his playing in my room, and now asked me if I would arrange with Blandot to take a lower room where I could not hear him in the night. He would defray the difference in rent.

As I sat deciphering the execrable French, I felt more lenient toward the old man. So when I had finished reading, I shook my host by the hand, and departed as a friend.

The next day Blandot gave me a more expensive room on the third floor.

There was no one on the fourth floor.

It was not long before I found that Zann's eagerness for my company was not as great as it had seemed while he was persuading me to move down from the fifth story. He did not ask me to call on him, and when I did call he appeared uneasy and played listlessly. This was always at night—in the day he slept and would admit no one. My liking for him did not grow, though the attic room and the weird music seemed to hold an odd fascination for me. I had a curious desire to look out of that window, over the wall and down the unseen slope.

What I did succeed in doing was to overhear the nocturnal playing of the dumb old man. At first I would tip-toe up to my old fifth floor, then I grew bold enough to climb the last creaking stair-

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case to the peaked garret. There in the narrow hall, outside the bolted door with the covered keyhole, I often heard sounds which filled me with an indefinable dread —the dread of vague wonder and brooding mystery. It was not that the sounds were hideous, for they were not; but that they held vibrations suggesting nothing on this globe of earth, and that at certain intervals they assumed a symphonic quality which I could hardly conceive as produced by one player.

Then one night as I listened at the door, I heard the shrieking viol swell into a chaotic babel of sound; a pandemonium which would have led me to doubt my own shaking sanity had there not come from behind that barred portal a piteous proof that the horror was real—the awful, inarticulate cry which only a mute can utter, and which rises only in moments of the most terrible fear or anguish. I knocked repeatedly at the door, but received no response. Afterward I waited in the black hallway, shivering with cold and fear, till I heard the poor musician's feeble effort to rise from the floor by the aid of a chair. Believing him just conscious after a fainting fit, I renewed my rapping, at the same time calling out my name reassuringly. I heard Zann stumble to the window and close both shutter and sash, then stumble to the door, which he falteringly unfastened to admit me. This time his delight at having me present was real.

Shaking pathetically, the old man forced me into a chair whilst he sank into another, beside which his viol and bow lay carelessly on the floor. He sat for some time inactive, nodding oddly, but having a paradoxical suggestion of intense and frightened listening. Subsequently he seemed to be satisfied, and crossing to a chair by the table wrote a brief note, handed it to me, and returning to the table, where he began to write rapidly and incessantly. The note implored me in the name of mercy, to wait where I was while he prepared a full account in German of all the marvels and terrors which beset him. I waited, and the dumb man's pencil flew.

■ IT WAS perhaps an hour later, while I still waited and while the old musician's feverishly written sheets still continued to pile up, that I saw Zann start as from the hint of a horrible shock. Unmistakably he was looking at the curtained window and listening shudderingly. Then I half fancied I heard a sound myself; though it was not a horrible sound, but rather an exquisitely low and infinitely distant musical note, suggesting a player in one of the neighboring houses, or in some abode beyond the lofty wall over which I had never been able to look. Upon Zann the effect was terrible, for, dropping his pencil, suddenly he rose, seized his viol, and commenced to rend the night with the wildest playing I had ever heard from his bow save when listening at the barred door.

It would be useless to describe the playing of Erich Zann on that dreadful night. It was more horrible than anything I had ever overheard, because I could not see the expression of his face, and could realize that this time the motive was stark fear. He was trying to make a noise; to ward something off or drown something out—what, I could not imagine, awesome though I felt it must be. The playing grew fantastic, delirious, and hysterical, yet kept to the last the qualities of supreme genius which I know this strange old man possessed. I recognized the air—it was a wild Hungarian dance popular in the theaters.

Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate viol. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a monkey, always looking frantically at the curtained window. In his frenzied strains I could almost see shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning. And then I thought I heard a shriller, steadier note that was not from the viol; a calm, deliberate, purposeful, mocking note from far away in the west.

At this juncture the shutter began to rattle in a howling night wind which had sprung up outside as if in answer to the

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mad playing within. Zann's screaming viol now outdid itself emitting sound I had never thought a viol could emit. The shutter rattled more loudly, unfastened, and commenced slamming against the window. Then the glass broke shiveringly under the persistent impacts, and the chill wind rushed in, making the candles sputter and rustling the sheets of paper on the table where Zann had begun to write out his horrible secret. I looked at Zann, and saw that he was past conscious observation. His blue eyes were bulging, glassy and sightless, and the frantic playing had become a blind, mechanical unrecognizable orgy that no pen could even suggest.

A sudden gust, stronger than the others, caught up the manuscript and bore it toward the window. I followed the flying sheets in desperation, but they were gone before I reached the demolished panes. Then I remembered my old wish to gaze from this window, the only window in the Rue d'Auseil from which one might see the slope beyond the wall, and the city outspread beneath. It was very dark, but the city's lights always burned, and I expected to see them there amidst the rain and wind. Yet when I looked from that highest of all gable windows, looked while the candles sputtered and the insane viol howled with the night-wind, I saw no city spread below, and no friendly lights gleamed from remembered streets, but only the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything on earth. And as I stood there looking in terror, the wind blew out both the candles in that ancient peaked garret, leaving me in savage and impenetrable darkness with chaos and pandemonium before me, and the demon madness of that night-baying viol behind me.

I staggered back in the dark, without the means of striking a light, crashing against the table, overturning a chair, and finally groping my way to the place where the blackness screamed with shocking music. To save myself and Erich Zann I could at least try, whatever the powers opposed to me. Once I thought some chill thing brushed me, and I screamed, but my scream could not be heard above the hideous viol. Suddenly out of the blackness the madly sawing bow struck me, and I knew I was close to the player. I felt ahead, touched the back of Zann's chair, and then found and shook his shoulder.

He did not respond, and still the viol shrieked on without slackening. I moved my hand to his head, whose mechanical nodding I was able to stop, and shouted in his ear that we must both flee from the unknown things of the night. But he neither answered me nor abated the frenzy of his unutterable music, while all through the garret strange currents of wind seemed to dance in the darkness and babel. When my hand touched his ear I shuddered, though I knew not why —knew not why till I felt of the still face; the ice-cold, stiffened, unbreathing face whose glassy eyes bulged uselessly into the void. And then, by some miracle, finding the door and the large wooden bolt, I plunged wildly away from that glassy-eyed thing in the dark, and from the ghoulish howling of that accursed viol whose fury increased even as I plunged.

Leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs through the dark house; racing mindlessly out into the narrow, steep, and ancient street of steps and tottering houses; clattering down steps and over cobbles to the lower streets and the putrid canyon-walled river; panting across the great dark bridge to the broader, healthier streets and boulevards we know; all these are terrible impressions that linger with me. And I recall that there was no wind, and that the moon was out, and that all the lights of the city twinkled.

Despite my most careful searches and investigations, I have never since been able to find the Rue d'Auseil. But I am not wholly sorry; either for this or for the loss in undreamable abysses of the closely-written sheets which alone could have explained the music of Erich Zann. ■ ■ ■

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Throughout his conscious evolution, Man has striven for that inconceivable something called perfection—assuming, for no reason at all, that perfection is desirable. In this little tale of pure Gothic horror, the author of the unforgettable Broadway fantasy, "Passing of the Third Floor Back," suggests perfection can be nothing short of cataclysmic—a tremendous concept, crystallized in the simple story of a girl who found the perfect partner with whom she could go on dancing "all her life". . . .

The Dancing-Partner

BY JEROME K. JEROME

"THIS STORY," commenced MacShaugnassy, "comes from Furtwangen, a small town in the Black Forest. There lived there a very wonderful old fellow named Nicholaus Geibel. His business was the making of mechanical toys, at which work he had acquired an almost European reputation. He made rabbits that would emerge from the heart of a cabbage, flop their ears, smooth their whiskers, and disappear again; cats that would wash their faces, and mew so naturally that dogs would mistake them for real cats, and fly at them; dolls, with phonographs concealed within them, that would raise their hats and say, 'Good morning; how do you do?' and some that would even sing a song.

"But he was something more than a mere mechanic; he was an artist. His work was with him a hobby, almost a passion. His shop was filled with all manner of strange things that never would, or could, be sold—things he had made for the pure love of making them. He had contrived a mechanical donkey that would trot for two hours by means of stored electricity, and trot, too, much faster than the live article, and with less need for exertion on the part of the driver; a bird that would shoot up into the air, fly around and around in a circle, and drop to earth at the exact spot from where it started; a skeleton that, supported by an upright iron bar, would dance a hornpipe; a life-size lady doll that could play the fiddle; and a gentleman with a hollow inside who could smoke a pipe and drink more lager beer than any three average German students put together, which is saying much.

"Indeed, it was the belief of the town that old Geibel could make a man capable of doing everything that a respectable man need want to do. One day he made a man who did too much, and it came about in this way:

"Young Doctor Follen had a baby, and the baby had a birthday. Its first birthday put Doctor Follen's household into somewhat of a flurry, but on the occasion of its second birthday, Mrs. Doctor Follen gave a ball in honour of the event. Old Geibel and his daughter Olga were among the guests.

"During the afternoon of the next day some three or four of Olga's bosom friends, who had also been present at the ball, dropped in to have a chat about it. They naturally fell to discussing the men,

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and to criticizing their dancing. Old Geibel was in the room, but he appeared to be absorbed in his newspaper, and the girls took no notice of him.

"'There seem to be fewer men who can dance at every ball you go to,' said one of the girls.

"'Yes, and don't the ones who can give themselves airs?' said another. 'They make quite a favour of asking you.'

"'And how stupidly they talk,' added a third. 'They always say exactly the same things: "How charming you are looking tonight." "Do you often go to Vienna? Oh, you should, it's delightful." "What a charming dress you have on." "What a warm day it has been." "Do you like Wagner?" I do wish they'd think of something new.'

"'Oh, I never mind how they talk,' said a fourth. 'If a man dances well he may be a fool for all I care.'

"'He generally is,' slipped in a thin girl, rather spitefully

"'I go to a ball to dance,' continued the previous speaker, not noticing the interruption. 'All I ask of a partner is that he shall hold me firmly, take me round steadily, and not get tired before I do.'

"'A clockwork figure would be the thing for you,' said the girl who had interrupted.

"Bravo!' cried one of the others, clapping her hands, 'what a capital idea!"

"'What's a capital idea?' they asked.

"'Why, a clockwork dancer, or, better still, one that would go by electricity and never run down.'

"The girls took up the idea with enthusiasm.

"'Oh, what a lovely partner he would make!' cried one. 'He would never kick you, or tread on your toes.'

"'Or tear your dress,' said another.

"'Or get out of step.'

"'Or get giddy and lean on you.'

"'And he would never want to mop his face with his handkerchief. I do hate to see a man do that after every dance.'

"'And wouldn't want to spend the whole evening in the supper room.'

"'Why, with a phonograph inside him to grind out all the stock remarks, you would not be able to tell him from a real man,' said the girl who had first suggested the idea.

"'Oh, yes, you would,' said the thin girl. 'He would be so much nicer.'

"Old Geibel had laid down his paper, and was listening with both his ears. On one of the girls glancing in his direction, however, he hurriedly hid himself again behind it.

"After the girls were gone, he went into his workshop, where Olga heard him walking up and down, and every now and then chuckling to himself; and that night he talked to her a good deal about dancing and dancing men—asked what they usually said and did—what dances were most popular—what steps were gone through, with many other such questions.

"Then for a couple of weeks he kept much to his factory, and was very thoughtful and busy, though prone at unexpected moments to break into a quiet low laugh, as if enjoying a joke that nobody else knew of.

"A month later another ball took place in Furtwangen. On this occasion it was given by old Wenzel, the wealthy timber merchant, to celebrate his niece's betrothal, and Geibel and his daughter were again among the invited.

"When the hour arrived to set out, Olga sought her father. Not finding him in the house, she tapped at the door of his workshop. He appeared in his shirtsleeves, looking hot but radiant.

"'Don't wait for me,' he said, 'you go on. I'll follow you. I've got something to finish.'

"As she turned to obey he called after her, 'Tell them I'm going to bring a young man with me—such a nice young man, and an excellent dancer. All the girls will like him.' Then he laughed and closed the door.

"Her father generally kept his doings secret from everybody, but she had a pretty shrewd suspicion of what he had been planning, and so, to a certain extent, was able to prepare the guests for what was coming. Anticipation ran high, and the arrival of the famous mechanist was eagerly awaited.

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"AT LENGTH the sound of wheels was heard outside, followed by a great commotion in the passage, and old Wenzel himself, his jolly face red with excitement and suppressed laughter, burst into the room and announced in stentorian tones:

" 'Herr Geibel—and a friend.'

"Herr Geibel and his 'friend' entered, greeted with shouts of laughter and applause, and advanced to the center of the room.

" 'Allow me, ladies and gentlemen,' said Herr Geibel, 'to introduce you to my friend, Lieutenant Fritz. Fritz, my dear fellow, bow to the ladies and gentlemen.'

"Geibel placed his hand encouragingly on Fritz's shoulder, and the lieutenant bowed low, accompanying the action with a harsh clicking noise in his throat, unpleasantly suggestive of a death rattle. But that was only a detail.

" 'He walks a little stiffly,' (old Geibel took his arm and walked him forward a few steps. He certainly did walk stiffly), 'but then, walking is not his forte. He is essentially a dancing man. I have only been able to teach him the waltz as yet, but at that he is faultless. Come, which of you ladies may I introduce him to as a partner? He keeps perfect time; he never gets tired; he won't kick you or tread on your dress; he will hold you as firmly as you like, and go as quickly or as slowly as you please; he never gets giddy; and he is full of conversation. Come, speak up for yourself, my boy.'

"The old gentleman twisted one of the buttons at the back of his coat, and immediately Fritz opened his mouth, and in thin tones that appeared to proceed from the back of his head, remarked suddenly, 'May I have the pleasure?' and then shut his mouth again with a snap.

"That Lieutenant Fritz had made a strong impression on the company was undoubted, yet none of the girls seemed inclined to dance with him. They looked askance at his waxen face, with his staring eyes and fixed smile, and shuddered. At last old Geibel came to the girl who had conceived the idea.

" 'It is you own suggestion, carried out to the letter,' said Geibel, 'an electric dancer. You owe it to the gentleman to give him a trial.'

"She was a bright, saucy little girl, fond of a frolic. Her host added his entreaties, and she consented.

"Herr Geibel fixed the figure to her. Its right arm was screwed round her waist, and held her firmly; its delicately jointed left hand was made to fasten itself upon her right. The old toymaker showed her how to regulate its speed, and how to stop it, and release herself.

" 'It will take you round in a complete circle,' he explained; 'be careful that no one knocks against you, and alters its course.'

"The music struck up. Old Geibel put the current in motion, and Annette and her strange partner began to dance.

"For a while everyone stood watching them. The figure performed its purpose admirably. Keeping perfect time and step, and holding its little partner tight clasped in an unyielding embrace, it revolved steadily.

" 'How charming you are looking tonight,' it remarked in its thin, far-away voice. 'What a lovely day it has been. Do you like dancing? How well our steps agree. You will give me another, won't you? Oh, don't be so cruel. What a charming gown you have on. Isn't waltzing delightful?'

"As she grew more familiar with the uncanny creature, the girl's nervousness wore off.

" 'Oh, he's just lovely,' she cried, laughing. 'I could go on dancing with him all my life.'

"Couple after couple now joined them, and soon all the dancers in the room were whirling round behind them. Nicholaus Geibel stood looking on, beaming with childish delight at his success.

"Old Wenzel approached him, and whispered something in his ear. Geibel laughed and nodded, and the two worked their way quietly towards the door.

" 'This is the young people's house tonight,' said Wenzel, so soon as they were outside; 'you and I will have a quiet pipe and a glass of hock, over in the counting-house.'

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"Meanwhile the dancing grew more fast and furious. Little Annette loosened the screw regulating her partner's rate of progress, and the figure flew round with her swifter and swifter. Couple after couple dropped out exhausted, but they only went the faster, till at length they remained dancing alone.

"Madder and madder became the waltz. The music lagged behind: the musicians, unable to keep the pace, ceased, and sat staring. The younger guests applauded, but the older faces began to grow anxious.

" 'Hadn't you better stop, dear?' said one of the women. "You'll make yourself so tired.'

"But Annette did not answer.

" 'I believe she's fainted,' cried out a girl who had caught sight of her face as it was swept by.

"One of the men sprang forward and clutched at the figure, but its impetus threw him down onto the floor, where its steel-cased feet laid bare his cheek. The thing evidently did not intend to part with its prize easily.

"Had anyone retained a cool head, the figure, one cannot help thinking, might easily have been stopped. Two or three men acting in concert might have lifted it bodily off the floor, or have jammed it into a corner. But few human heads are capable of remaining cool under excitement. Those who are not present think how stupid must have been those who were; those who are reflect afterwards how simple it would have been to do this, that, or the other, if only they had thought of it at the time.

"The women grew hysterical. The men shouted contradictory directions to one another. Two of them made a bungling rush at the figure, which had the result of forcing it out of its orbit in the center of the room, and sending it crashing against the walls and furniture. A stream of blood showed itself down the girl's white frock, and followed her along the floor. The affair was becoming horrible. The women rushed screaming from the room. The men followed them.

"One sensible suggestion was made: 'Find Geibel—fetch Geibel.'

"No one had noticed him leave the room, no one knew where he was. A party went in search of him. The others, too unnerved to go back into the ballroom, crowded outside the door and listened. They could hear the steady whir of the wheels upon the polished floor as the thing spun round and round; the dull thud as every now and again it dashed itself and its burden against some opposing object and ricocheted off in a new direction.

"And everlastingly it talked in that thin ghostly voice, repeating over and over the same formula: 'How charming you are looking tonight. What a lovely day it has been. Oh, don't be so cruel. I could go on dancing forever—with you. Have you had supper?'

"Of course they sought for Geibel everywhere but where he was. They looked in every room in the house, then rushed off in a body to his own place, and spent precious minutes in waking up his deaf old housekeeper. At last it occurred to one of the party that Wenzel was missing also, and then the idea of the counting-house across the yard presented itself to them, and there they found him.

"He rose up, very pale, and followed them; and he and old Wenzel forced their way through the crowd of guests gathered outside, and entered the room, and locked the door behind them.

"From within there came the muffled sound of low voices and quick steps, followed by a confused scuffling noise, then silence, then the low voices again.

"After a time the door opened, and those near it pressed forward to enter, but old Wenzel barred the way.

" 'I want you—and you, Bekler,' he said, addressing a couple of the elder men. His voice was calm, but his face was deadly white. 'The rest of you, please go—get the women away as quickly as you can.'

"From that day old Nicholaus Geibel confined himself to the making of mechanical rabbits, and cats that mewed and washed their faces." ■ ■ ■

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This story was born of a dark night of terror—when escape from this world seemed a priceless thing. Many of us might even want to flee all the way back to the days of the Snake, the eternally young Eve and the—

Golden Apple

By C. H. LIDDELL

"LOOKS AS if there might be a feature article in this," McDaniels said, shoving a folder across the desk at me. "You could play up the timely angle. Precious relic brought over from London—"

"Nuts," I said. "They're a dime a dozen."

"Suit yourself." His moon-face turned down again to the flimsies before him.

"Well—" I reached idly to flip the folder open. Extra cash always comes in handy, and I had nothing to do that night anyway. The blue dusk of New York autumn was darkening into windy night outside the *Chronicle's* windows; no news in particular was coming in on the wires, and I didn't feel much like going home yet. So I glanced through the folder from the morgue.

It didn't tell me much—mostly museum stuff. It seems that some time in the middle ages an unknown craftsman had made a pomander—a golden ball crusted with semi-precious stones, meant to hold perfumes. It was said to be a masterpiece of its type; the workman must have been very nearly as good as Cellini. The thing was hollow, and there was an ingenious secret spring concealed in the filigree. It had been so well concealed that the trick of opening the ball up was a lost art, apparently, up to 1890 or thereabouts when some museum curator—the fellow who'd written all this dope—borrowed the pomander for exhibition and decided to have a try. It took him weeks, expert as he was. But he found the hidden spring, and he drew a chart to show how it was done. I noticed by the scribble on the folder that we'd bought the curator's article and his chart, but never got around to printing them.

And there was a good deal of ancient history, how references to the pomander had appeared from time to time in old manuscripts. It was called the Golden Apple—pomander seems to mean apple—and was undoubtedly valuable, as much for its craftsmanship as for the value of its settings. And that was about all.

"So what?" I asked McDaniels.

He didn't bother to look up. "Some guy named Argyle got in yesterday on the Clipper. Seems he was bombed in London. Came over to recuperate, and brought the relic with him. Here's the address." A grimy hand pushed a scrap of paper toward me. "Want to see what you can dig up?"

I said I would, and reached for the telephone. The switchboard girl got Argyle for me, and when I'd told him who

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I was and what I wanted, he surprised me by suggesting I come on up right then. That was luck. So I stuffed the curator's article in my pocket and started off through the dim-out for Grand Central, with a few sharpened pencils and some old envelopes for taking notes. I didn't expect much.

I took the Lexington subway uptown. Just as I came up from the 86th Street station the wail of the blue alert sirens began to moan from a long way off. I said, "Oh-oh," and broke into a trot, hoping I'd have time to reach Argyle's place before the signal to get under cover. The howling of the alarm increased in volume as more and more sirens joined the chorus. I just made it. Argyle lived in a big apartment house near the Park, and street lights were blinking off as I rode up in the elevator as the second alarm keened its total blackout warning.

The corridor on the twelfth floor, where his apartment was, had been darkened too. Through big windows at each end I could see uptown New York changing from spangled cliffs to blind black silhouettes against the sky. And that was about all I could see. I stood there blankly. Then a door opened somewhere and a voice said, "Mr. Russell? The desk phoned you were on your way up. I'm Argyle."

"Right. How do I find you? I'm blind as a bat—"

"Straight ahead—there." A firm hand gripped my arm. "Come on in, but feel your way. The place is a mess—I haven't unpacked yet. Can't show a light, either—no blackout curtains here, damn it." I heard him stumble over something. He chuckled. "Look out for that box. Here we are now. There's a chair right behind you. You'll be able to see better in a few minutes, when you get used to the dark. I've got a lamp here, you'll notice."

I LOOKED, but scarcely saw it at first—one of those tiny blackout lamps that seems only to make black blacker by contrast. In its almost-invisible glow I could glimpse only the vague shadows of furniture and the outline of my companion, who seemed to be slightly built—I couldn't tell any more than that yet.

I heard him cross the room, his shoes squeaking faintly, and I heard glass clink.

"Drink? We can manage a straight one even in the dark, I think."

"Thanks." I accepted the glass he creaked across the room to hand me. "I'm sorry to impose on you, but I guess I'm stuck here until the all clear."

"Glad for the company. You wanted an interview about the pomander, didn't you? I noticed the customs man seemed interested. I suppose you found out about it from him?"

I acknowledged that. Argyle chuckled.

"So it really has a history, eh? I didn't know. I picked it up one day in an antique shop. . . . Let's trade information. I'm very curious."

"Fair enough," I said, tasting the brandy. It was good. I paraphrased the stuff in the morgue folder, and Argyle began to rummage in the darkness, his shoes wheezing softly across the carpet. I didn't see him coming toward me, but the noise was enough. His hand fell on my shoulder.

"Oh, there you are. Reach out. Here's the Golden Apple, but you'll have to admire it by touch only. What was it, now, about a secret spring? Must be very secret. I never noticed."

"It took an expert to find the trick," I said, turning the globe over in my hand. It was about as large as an orange, and had a rough, fretted surface like metal lace. I could feel the coldness of the gems.

"The light might help a little," Argyle suggested. I got out of my chair and crouched down by the tiny lamp. Feeble as it was, I could see flecks of fire glinting from the pomander, and the gold was soft and mellow and intricately worked.

The thing was archaic—the touch of it had told me that. Maybe I'd never have noticed in the daylight, but here in the dark the senses you have left seem sharper. By the very feel of the pomander I knew that hands long dust—delicate, loving hands—had wrought it into a shape of

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intricate beauty. The smooth, cold gems—amethyst and moonstone and many I couldn't identify—were arabesques against the fretted gold. I thought of sardonyx and chrysoprase, cymophane and jacinth, moon-ruled selenite, and the magic meloceus that is ruled by blood. Jacinth, peridot, bezoar—names submerged in the depths of my memory swam up, bringing with them the curious fragrance of a tapestried and long-forgotten past.

There was magic in that relic. The breath of ancient life stirred in it as I looked in that dim radiance at the Golden Apple and it winked back at me, many-eyed, cold-eyed, all the loveliness of the past compressed into an orb no larger than my hands could compass. In the darkness it gathered all the faint glow of the blackout lamp and shone like a sun that might rise above magic lands.

Argyle's voice roused me. "Can you work the spring?"

I said, after a moment, "I don't know. Maybe. Shall I try?"

"Please. Nothing in it, I suppose, but—You know, come to think of it, you're not the first man after all who told me about the secret spring. I can't imagine how it slipped my mind until now—" His voice trailed off for a moment. "American, he was, in London. Told me he'd studied the pomander once, years before. I promised to let him see the thing, but the poor old boy was killed before we kept our engagement. It was in nineteen forty, you see."

I remembered that terrible autumn. "No wonder you forgot," I said. "Plenty must have been happening around then to keep you busy. Was the old man the curator of—" I named the museum.

"Why, yes. That's right."

"He studied the pomander 'way back in eighteen ninety," I told him. "I've got his report in my pocket. The trick's simple enough, once you know how. But until then—"

I knew it, after reading the file, but even so my fingers fumbled and felt clumsy on those exquisitely filigreed surfaces. It took me several minutes to get the trick of it. Then the pomander opened in my hand, falling apart in hinged halves. It was hollow.

But it was not empty.

I stared down at the many times folded packet of—papers? They didn't look old. The stuff had the feel of parchment, but it seemed thinner than onion-skin flimsies, and there was writing visible, a word here and there in unmistakable modern English.

"You're wrong," I told Argyle. "Look at this. You may have a find here."

The papers crackled as I unfolded them. But Argyle, leaning down above my shoulder, reached out to take them before I could see anything in the tiny blackout glow.

"Let me," he said, in a curious, strained voice. It was the same intonation he had used when he spoke of forgetting, in the blitzes, about the secret the old curator had told. Now he took up the light and turned almost jealously away from me, holding the lamp so close to the papers they must nearly have scorched as he strained to read in that feeble glow.

I could see the slim silhouette of him against the light for a moment or two. He was quite motionless, only the papers rustling faintly. Then I heard him sigh—a deep, deep, nearly soundless sigh as if all the breath in his lungs had gone out at once.

"What is it?" I asked.

He said, very quietly, "Let me finish this, Russell. Let me—oh, it isn't possible! My God, it isn't possible!"

I felt news instinct quicken in me. "Read it out loud."

"No . . . no. Let me alone!" His voice was suddenly harsh. "You can see it—afterward. Let me alone now, for heaven's sake!"

I didn't say anything. I watched him cross the room—a silhouette against a tiny moving blur of light—and sit down in a far corner, the back of his chair almost hiding him from me. He went on reading, with a tenseness I could feel in the very air. The pages rustled now and then. I sat there in the dark, playing with the

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pomander and pouring an occasional drink from the decanter, though I had to grope for it blindly each time. I was tremendously keyed up with anticipation, and the wait seemed long.

The blackout was still in full darkness over New York when I heard the faint noise of Argyle's shoes coming back across the carpet. He put the little lamp down on a table beside me and laid the manuscript in my lap.

"Let me have the Golden Apple," he said, his voice so strained that I scarcely knew it.

I stared up at the pale oval blur of his face, the black, formless outlines of him in the dimness.

"What does it say?" I asked.

"You...read it." He took the pomander. "You'll see what—it explains everything. Good-by, Russell. After you've read, you'll understand."

"Good-by! Wait—Argyle—" I stared at the shadow retreating toward its corner. I heard the sound of his shoes fall silent, and the creak of the chair as he sat down. And then—

There was a breath of air through the room, as if someone had brushed by in haste. There was no noise to match it, but somehow, quite definitely, I sensed that where there had been two people in this room an instant before, now there was only one.

"Argyle—" I said.

No answer. I knew he was not there any longer.

I took the lamp and with its faint aid went to look at his chair. It was empty. I had not heard it creak when he rose, but it was empty now. I had not heard the soft sound of his shoes and I knew he had not moved across the carpeted floor, but he was not in the room any longer. The realization was not the result of reasoning from these bits of evidence, though I knew I must have heard him, sensed his leaving. No, it was a matter of utter, unarguable conviction with me. Psychic certainty, if you like. He had—winked out, like a candle.

With the pomander.

I SEARCHED the apartment. I went out into the hall, groping and calling. But I did not find him. When I returned, the manuscript that had been in the Golden Apple lay scattered on the carpet, where I had dropped it as I sprang up.

I gathered the papers together, my mind still blankly incredulous. The answer to the secret must lie here, I realized, if it lay anywhere at all. I sat down, holding the little lamp close and straining my eyes in the dimness to make out what the pages held.

And so I read the record upon them that John Argyle himself had written, in the early days of the war, when the first bombs were falling upon London . . . when he had stumbled upon the magic of the golden pomander engraved by that unknown artisan whose bones were dust so long since. For my feeling when I first touched the pomander had not been wrong. There was magic in that archaic, lovely thing, a perilous sorcery that opened the gateways of a lost dream. . . . And as I read, I understood what it was that had happened to John Argyle on a cool autumn night in London, in his apartment near Kensington. . . .

* * *

The war was young yet. The Germans had not yet unleashed the full terror of their blitz. Nor had America yet thrown her strength into the balance. The raiders came over the Channel to blast England into submission, but already the RAF was meeting their challenge.

In a year, John Argyle thought, he would be old enough to fly too. A long time, of course—a year. Before then the war might be won—or lost. Sitting by the fire in the chill of the evening, he turned the pomander over and over in his hands, watching its jewels glinting many-colored and remembering his conversation with the museum curator from America. A secret spring. . . . He fingered the fretted gold hopefully, pressing it here and there. Firelight blazed from the gems. Hypnotic, almost. He held the pomander up, turn-

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ing it slowly, enjoying the play of light and color.

Golden Apple...the Golden Apples of Idun, that gave eternal youth to Valhalla's gods. Magic. There might be something inside this from the very old days, if he could only find the spring. His fingers pressed and slipped over the golden surfaces...he felt something move a little....

Noiselessly, upon smooth hinges, the pomander opened in his hands. And suddenly, like a twilight veil there in the London flat, the spell of ancient sorcery began to drop, layer by layer, about him.

He was staring into the shining opened hollow of the globe.... Reflections moved there, so bright, so enchanting that everything else in the room fell back into shadows. Little shapes of color so pure, so clear. . . . But they were distorted shapes, the curves of the hollow disguising them. He did not glance behind him for the source of those moving reflections. He knew that nothing in the room could be casting such colors as these. Nothing had substance but those moving bits of brightness....

Not even the earth underfoot. It shifted unstably as he walked.... He was taking long, sliding strides that carried him over a shaking land dizzily while everything around him quivered. The air was grey smoke that shook too, in long, slow waves. Only the pomander's shining mirror in his hands held its image clearly, and he thought after a while that the little broken shapes moving within it were beginning to take form....

For a long while he must have gone striding and stumbling through the dusk, the earth shaking underfoot, the pomander held up before him like a Grail. He could see in it now that somewhere a lawn was green as velvet, with yellow sunshine falling over trees and over the walls of a strange, stiff little castle whose banners stood out as if upon a gale. He could not see it clearly yet, but the image was taking shape....

Then in one last, long stride his foot struck solid ground. Sunshine poured down about him like a tent of warmth, and suddenly the reflections in the pomander were bodiless no longer. They were real reflections, mirroring the scene around him. The velvet lawn, spangled with small, flat, starry flowers, the castle with its straining banners, the deep woods beyond. And over the flowery lawn someone was moving toward him, someone who glittered in the sunlight.

He was not at all surprised. He was beyond surprise, or outside it. From first to last he had no feeling of strangeness or unreality here, not even questioning in his mind whether it were all a dream. He knew it was not. He knew it was real. He drew a long breath of the sweet sunny air and looked upon a little world of preposterous familiarity. Perhaps the fact that he had seen it all before so many times helped make its reality clear to him.

For this was the world of old missals and tapestries and church paintings, the same stiff little scenes he had so often encountered before, painstakingly traced by the loving, inexpert hands of medieval artists. Here were the trees and fountains he had seen in the bright pages of Froissart and twined into the capitals of old Malorian texts. The lawn was strewn with the same unreal, flat flowers that Botticelli painted beneath the feet of his dancing nymphs. And over the grass a girl was hurrying now. . . .

She was very slim in the bell of her swaying skirts, and she was blindingly golden in the sunlight, the gown standing out about her stiff with the richness of its embossed and embroidered fabric. A stiff, flat collar of hammered gold lay across her shoulders, and she wore a golden crown pierced with fleur-de-lys patterns. Beneath it her pale hair streamed smoothly about a sad little lifted face whose great black eyes looked anxiously into his.

"You did come back!" she called. "Oh, you did come back! You remembered!" And then, because she was near enough now to see his face, her hurry slackened and her shoulders drooped beneath the golden collar. She said in a different voice, "Who are you?"

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He did not answer. He could not. He stood appalled by the knowledge that through all her speech she had not once opened her lips. Not once.

And yet she had spoken in a voice that was very sweet, very clear...and not exactly in English. Not in any language at all. The thought behind her speech was as clear in his mind as her golden figure was clear in the sunshine, but she had used no words. And he had no time to marvel over it, because something that had been nagging at the fringes of consciousness sprang suddenly now into full clarity. Hers was not the only "voice" that spoke here. The air was heavy with "voices", not easy to catch because they had no human focus. Distorted pictures flashed by through his mind of many thoughts—winged thoughts in the sunny upper air, with the green world tilting below. Deep, soft, shadowy thoughts of woodlands and brown sliding water and solitude. Grassroot thoughts, tiny, distorted, unfocused. He had been hearing them as one hears the noises of a summer night, many small sounds blending into stillness. He knew the little minds that must lie behind them, the hares and the birds and the foxes so dear to medieval artists. He could not see them, but he caught the voices of their minds.

And then, for just one glancing moment, a thought as red and dangerous as fresh wet blood flashed through every other thought that wavered in the air. Flashed, and was gone. There was no counterpart for the thinker of that terrible thought in any medieval picture he had ever seen. A dumb, blind, murderous thought, keen as a sword in the sunlight, but keen for killing and for no other purpose. No intelligence in it. Only murder.

Then it was gone, and the girl was stooping to pull a flower from the grass, her skirts collapsing about her in a great golden billow. It was a little six-pointed star of a flower, yellow petaled, with yellow leaf and stem, and in its heart a quivering triangle of scarlet. And he remembered suddenly something he had never known he knew until this moment—how the four queens of the card deck carry flowers in their stiff little fists. Small flowers like this one. . . .

"You have never been here before, have you?" said the girl in her clear and voiceless speech. "No one ever comes back, of course. . . ." She peered up at him. She had a medieval face, with a round, childlike forehead and a soft, small mouth and the great, dark, sidelong eyes, a little sad now. She twirled the flower between her fingers and looked at him. "They never come back," she said again.

"Who?" he asked, his voice sounding strangely loud in this silent world of thoughts. And he was watching the woods restlessly, waiting a repetition of that dangerous flash he had caught a moment ago. "Who never comes back?"

"No one," said the girl. "Not even the Sorceror, any more. I'm glad, anyhow, that you are not old, like him."

"You'll have to tell me about the Sorceror," Argyle said gently. "I don't know anything about this world, you know."

She looked up at him with a puzzled smile.

"It seems strange to hear you say so, when you stand there in the Sorceror's clothing. But I can see that you speak the truth."

Argyle looked down in surprise. He was wearing something unfamiliar, a stiff tunic as fantastic as her gown, heavy with golden embroidery and medieval in cut and richness. Only the pomander remained now to link him with a London that might have been a dream. . . .

"Others have come in the Sorceror's garments," the girl said, and shrugged a little beneath the golden collar. "Two of them were old, and I did not care when they went away. The young man—well, he went away very quickly, before I could tell him the way back. I was sorry. I thought for a moment when I saw you... but you are young too, aren't you? Perhaps you'll stay."

"Perhaps," Argyle said. "I'd like to stay. . . . Why did the young man leave so quickly?"

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"He did not wish to die," the girl said, and smiled, twirling the flower. "Death must be a curious thing. Nothing ever dies here except those from outside."

"And what," demanded Argyle, "do they die of?"

"They die of the Snake," the girl told him thoughtfully, and looked down at the yellow flower. "The Sorceror put it here when he built the world. I think he meant it to keep out everyone but himself and me. But now...." She sighed. "It does seem lonely here sometimes. The world is so small, and no one lives here any more except the Snake and the little creatures and me."

"WHO WAS the Sorceror?" Argyle asked, fascinated. The girl put out her hand and took his in her smooth, cool fingers.

"Come up to the castle with me. The Sorceror has forgotten us long ago. He must be dead by now. Or has time gone by outside? There is no time here, you know. He wanted it that way. He dreaded old age.... So here it is always Now. But once you step outside, through the Shaking Land—you forget. It has something to do with time. It was only by accident the Sorceror found the way to come back, and after that—" She glanced up at him again, her small mouth quirking. "Shall I tell you how he found the way back? Not yet, I think. Or perhaps I shall...." Her smile promised that she would. Her fingers tightened on his.

"What about the Snake?" Argyle asked, his eyes searching the trees.

"Oh, I think it must be asleep now. It would have come for you sooner than this if it knew you were here at all. Perhaps in the castle I can hide you for a while." She said it unconcernedly. Death meant nothing to her, nor the passage of time. And Argyle could do nothing but walk beside her over the flowery grass, the unfamiliar tunic stiff against his knees as he moved.

All this was not a dream. It was vividly real, but he felt no terror yet of the danger he knew must come for him soon. The girl's fingers were warm in his, and her small, sad face enchanted him, smiling up as they walked through the sunny silence toward the castle.

He knew presently what she meant when she said that it must always be Now in this nameless world. For time had no meaning. They might have been hours approaching the castle gate, or only seconds. The vague, unfocussed thoughts of the little beings who peopled the world drifted idly through the air. Now and then a flash of murderous brilliance slashed across them and was gone. The Snake, perhaps, in its dreams.... But the girl's sidelong eyes were eloquent upon his, and her twining fingers soft, and the sad little face touched his heart with its loneliness and its strangeness.

"Presently you will go," she said, after a while. "And I shall be alone again. If I tell you the secret of the way back—would you come? I should like you to come."

"Tell me," he said. "I promise. I'll come back."

And so she told him. It was very simple. She led him by the hand into the castle hall and through it into a round, paneled room with a desk in its center and a quill pen sitting in a little carved box of sand. There was parchment paper on the desk, and a well of purple ink.

"These are the Sorceror's," said the girl. "But I think he must be dead.... You can only come back if you remember, so you must write down the way and the secret of the pomander, and write down what lies inside the Shaking Land, so you will know your promise again, and remember me.... Sit down and write, John Argyle, and may you never forget as the others did. Please, John Argyle, remember me!"

So he wrote, with that plaintive little voice ringing in his mind. "Please remember me!" Its poignancy disturbed him as he scratched the quill of the long dead Sorceror over the Sorceror's parchment sheets, putting down the girl's beauty and her loneliness so that he could not forget them again, putting down the strange beauty of this world, and the menace of

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the Snake, so that he would remember that too. . . .

He covered three sheets with the purple ink, while time stood still in the silence of the enchanted castle. Not until he had nearly finished did an obvious thought occur to him.

"Why should you stay here?" he asked her, striking the quill back into its box of purple-stained sand. "Why not come back with me?"

She shook her gold-crowned head. "Finish," she said. "Fold up the parchment, and put it in the pomander, because that is the only thing you brought here and the only thing you can take away. No, I can't go with you. I belong here. I would die in the Shaking Lands. Nothing can leave this world, and nothing can live here very long except the Snake and me." Her sigh shook the golden collar about her shoulders.

Argyle, crackling the parchment sheets, looked up sharply. He had caught a flashing thought, keener than her own, in the quiet air of the room.

"The Snake?" he said. The girl straightened, her eyes going unfocused and faraway. Then she nodded.

"Soon," she said. "You will come back, though? Presently perhaps it will sleep again, after you have gone. And I shall be lonely. You will not forget?"

"I promise," said Argyle. "I'll come back. But—"

Sharp and keen through the quiet the thought of murder flashed. A bright crimson thought, so that Argyle could almost see the color in the air. It was time to go. Time to go fast! He stuffed the crackling sheets into the pomander.

"Show me the way," he said. And she obeyed, moving swiftly in her stiff golden skirts. Her fingers clung to his almost desperately, and her unhappy little face looked up at his so that she stumbled as she pulled him out of the room and down the hall to the door. And then they were running across the grass, with danger making the air electric behind them from the forest.

The shining flowers flashed past underfoot. The Shaking Lands loomed up dim before them, grey air wavering in a wall beyond the sunshine, and the earth shifting beneath it. The girl pressed his hands hard around the pomander. Tiptoeing, she laid her arms about his neck, brushing his mouth with hers.

"Please come back. Please remember me!"

Beyond her, he caught one bright and terrifying glimpse of a scarlet shape gliding out from among the trees. A shape of dreadful beauty, colored like blood and of so pure and clear a tint that the redness quivered like life itself. He could scarcely take his eyes away from it.

"Run!" called the girl. "And—remember!"

But Argyle was in no hurry to run. He was remembering what she had told him of the Shaking Lands, and the possibility of victory over the Snake suddenly dazzled him. If he could lure it out here into the dizziness and the dimness of this border limbo, perhaps. . . .

It came writhing toward him as he stood waiting in the shadow, its crimson like the flow of fresh blood over the green grass. It was beautiful as the Serpent in Eden must have been beautiful, and as dangerous as that first Snake. It lifted its lovely shining head and hissed at him soundlessly, and the murder in its mindless brain shook him so that he turned to run. . . .

And it followed. Its terrible, single-minded purpose was like lightning in the dim air around him, flashing the voice of its thought into his brain. And that alone was frightening enough, without those great sliding coils following, following as he ran. The unstable earth shook beneath his slipping feet. He clutched the pomander and stumbled on, glancing back now and then to see the scarlet blur following purposefully behind, closer every time he looked.

From far away the girl's voice echoed in his brain, "John Argyle—come back to me! Remember me, John Argyle!"

But it was a very distant voice, more a memory than a thought, and already he

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could see the gleam of firelight ahead where he had left that room in London a timeless while ago. Smoky memories were curling lazily through his mind—smoky—dissipating. . . .

■ THAT WAS the way it must have ended, though the writing ended sooner. Maybe the Snake died out there in the Shaking Lands, I thought. Maybe the way was open now for him to go back. As he had gone. . . . For I knew that he had kept his promise at last, that he and the girl were standing, at this very moment perhaps, on the strange green grass among the flowers, with medieval sunlight pouring down around them, and no Snake to spoil their Eden. . . .

The scream of sirens from outside woke me out of that particular vision. I came back with a jolt into this world again, hearing the wardens' whistles and seeing the lights go on outside the windows as New York came back to life.

There was a click from the wall. I jumped. The lights that went on showed me John Argyle, one hand on the switch and a look of stunned disbelief making his face empty.

Looking at him, I knew all in one glance exactly what had happened. I knew, I think, even quicker than he. He was still stupefied by the surprise of it. But as he looked beyond me, I saw understanding dawn upon his face, and before I turned I knew what must hang on the wall behind me. I knew what he was seeing there. A mirror, and his own face. A face that the girl in the magical land had not remembered. . . .

Yes, he had returned to her. He had kept the promise he made when sorcery opened the way to her in the early days of the war. But that had not been this war. In 1914, too, there had been German bombers over London. . . . It was thirty years ago that John Argyle found the key to dreams.

So I knew what he had seen in the eyes of the golden girl, the Queen of Hearts with her yellow flower in her hand. Young, in a world made out of a Sorceror's longing for youth, and its key the Golden Apple of Idun that promised youth to the gods. But not to mortals.

I knew she had not known him. The thirty years had been nothing to her in her world of eternal Now. I wondered if the Snake were dead, and the way open for another man—a young man, luckier than Argyle—to find the pomander's secret and step through the Shaking Lands into that tiny world of beauty and loneliness, where a girl in a golden gown would still be waiting for the young John Argyle who never would return.

Argyle turned away from me and the mirror. I heard a thump upon the carpet. The Golden Apple of Idun had fallen from his hand. ■ ■ ■

In the Next Issue

Beauty of perfect innocence, combined with the powers of hell—an unearthly creature was she, the last flaming hope of a civilization battling for its own extinction. So startingly timely as to be almost a prophecy, yet warmly, unforgettably human, Robert W. Chambers' deathless fantasy, THE SLAYER OF SOULS, is a must on your reading schedule!

Also, it is our great pleasure to announce that we are resuming illustrations which the change in format forced us to shelve temporarily. "The Slayer of Souls" will be illustrated by Virgil Finlay.

Don't miss it in the next issue—out February 28!

—Mary Gnaedinger, *Editor*

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

ABOUT OCTOBER ISSUE

Dear Editor:

Ah, at last! "The Woman Who Couldn't Die" is even better at this third reading than when I read it first a few years ago. It is too bad that Mr. Stringer wrote no more fantasies, as he certainly shows a remarkable flair for unusual people, places and events in this novel. That "Preface in Hordoland" sets the predominant mood of the novel, which carries through to a tremendous climax.

"The Weigher of Souls," even more than "The War with the Moon" or "The Thought-Reading Machine," proves André Maurois' adeptness at fantasy. At first I thought that "The Weigher of Souls" would be merely another story of a sadly frequent type, like Stilson's "Liberty or Death?" which you republished in F.N.; however, as the story progressed, it took on a quality of delicate weirdness (that's the only expression I can think of to express the idea) that had a strange effect on me. I'm glad that Maurois ended the story on a note of appropriate tragedy to complement the general mood of the narrative.

Peter Cartur's short-short was one of those minor gems that one finds every once in a while—a complete and coherent plot expressed simply, yet with sufficient impact to make its impression a more than fleeting one. The derivation of the title is a bit obscure, but it fits the idea of the story perfectly. "Not sun by day, *nor moon by night . . . .*"

De Soto, yet? Where are Dodge, Plymouth and Chrysler? The fiery claw in the corner of the cover is very good—no facetiousness intended—but the rest of the painting is not only inaccurate but poorly done. Where, oh where, is Lawrence? It's about time for another masterpiece like the covers for "Ship of Ishtar," "Valley of Silent Men" or "Morning Star." We fen have almost ceased to hope for a Finlay cover to equal the ones for "The Star Rover" and "Devil's Spoon." Why not surprise us?

The poetry section is back, praise Allah! Keep it now that you've got it, please? You could alternate between original verse and reprints. Such great poems as R. E. Howard's "The Dream and the Shadow," "The Ghost Kings" and "The Singer in the Mist" do not deserve to be neglected as they almost of necessity have been by the newer fans. "In Planders' Wood' is one of the best poems you have printed so far.

Aha, I am reminded: Del Close of Manhattan, Kansas, and I are putting out a small poetry fanzine called *Cataclysm*, and we could use contributions and subscriptions (@ 50c for 6 issues).

"Brood of the Witch-Queen" for next issue, I see. Wonderful! That has long been my favorite of Rohmer's books, and seeing it again will be a pleasure. Arthur S. Ward (Sax Rohmer) has a phenomenal knowledge of the Mysterious East and its ways—and he has written a reference book on sorcery, so the basis of this novel is founded on actual fact and accepted myth. The myth part being the sorcery; one would fervently hope that such things as the Orchid of Death and the Fire Elemental could not actually be!

I have a few items for sale or trade. Will send lists if you send stamped envelope.

ROBERT E. BRINEY.

561 W. Western Ave.,
Muskegon, Mich.

CONCERNING MAUROIS

I am taking this means of congratulating the editor and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* upon having secured printing rights for "The Weigher of Souls" by André Maurois.

Fantasy is a very specialized field in creative writing and I am sure that even the most avid Merritt, Haggard, or Lovecraft fan will admit that the works of those fantasy giants are not known in many literary circles. This is not the case with Maurois. His "Ariel," a fictional biography of the life of Shelley, has been widely read and acclaimed and his "Man's Fate" is considered one of the classics of modern literature. He is at present the top writer for Charles De Gaulle's French political front. His works are required reading in many college English courses. It is obvious that this man Maurois is no fly-by-night author who will slip into oblivion

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once his writings have ceased. "The Weigher of Souls" lived up to Maurois' reputation. It was cleverly conceived and brilliantly written and, in my opinion, far outshone your lead novel.

As long as you can print stories by authors of Maurois' caliber, you can rest assured that F.F.M. will continue to lead the fantasy field.

KENT SHEARER.

414 E. 2nd St.,
Russell, Kans.

LIKED CARTUR'S STORY

Just a few lines from a faithful follower. Of all the stf. and fant. mags on the market, and there are many, yours stands out among them as a king among beggars.

The lead novel for October was a superb piece of writing. I couldn't put the book down until I was through. I even missed two of my favorite programs on the radio!

The "Weigher of Souls" was a little too talky for me, although it wasn't bad reading.

The short "Nor Moon By Night" was the best short I think I have read. Usually I frown on fillers but this had what it takes.

I did not care for the cover.

Well, I guess that's all for now, but you'll be hearing from me again soon. The stories I would like to see in print are: "Maker of Shadows" by Jack Mann and anything by Rohmer as most of his work is hard to get.

So long for now,

JAN ROMANOFF.

26601 South Western,
Apt. 341,
Lomita, Calif.

COBLENTZ POEM PRAISED

Orchids to Stanton A. Coblentz for his wonderful poem featured in the April 1950 issue.

"After the Atom" is terrifying in all aspects. Gruesome isn't it?

A world blazing with unbearable heat through the day, and frigid with absolute zero at night.

I wondered, as I read, if this could really happen; then I read the daily papers. If we keep up the pace we are traveling it most definitely can happen.

Let's hope we will stop before it is too late, and use this tremendous, almost sacred power for beneficial reasons.

For the cure of sickness and for the betterment of future humanity.

J. STAMP.

28 Churchill Crescent,
Georgetown, Ontario,
Canada.

DUPLICATE MAGS AVAILABLE

I have a number of duplicate copies of F.F.M., including the first issue, and am interested in trading for copies of other magazines or will sell them at reasonable rates. I also have several hundred dupes of other science fiction and fantasy mags. Most of the dates are from 1939 to the present.

GERRY DE LA REE.

277 Howland Ave.,
River Edge, N.J.

RARE BOOK OFFER

Congratulations on the care you are exercising in the selection of stories for F.F.M. As a British reader I am particularly proud to see that quite a percentage of the stories come from these shores. I like, too, the free and easy comradeship of the letter columns. Few editors allow their readers to advertise their spare books and magazines or let them argue their likes and dislikes as you do.

My own criticisms are few. From a collector's point of view, however, one defect has been noticeable from the magazine's earliest days. Most folks have their favorite stories and, myself, like many another collector, I occasionally extract a story and bind it in a more permanent form. It is heartbreaking therefore to find sometimes that another favourite story starts immediately behind the last page of the extracted yarn. As, over here, F.F.M.s are at a premium, too often this means that the second story must be lost, as purchasing another F.F.M. is an impossibility. Some collectors might suggest binding the two stories together to save losing one. To the enthusiastic omnibus collector, putting another author in centre of the collected stories of (say) Kuttner, Merritt or Lovecraft would be sacrilege. My suggestion, therefore, is that in all of your magazines, the reverse of the final page of each story should have either "readers' letters" thereon, or something of minor importance such as a page of poetry, an advert, etc.

May I, in conclusion, mention that I have a large number of spare books for exchange or sale at reasonable prices, including quite a number of the stories you have printed in recent years (Haggard, S. Fowler Wright, E. F. Benson, Robt. W. Chambers, Jack Mann, etc.) and would welcome enquiries.

FRED C. BROWN.

255 Burges Road,
East Ham,
London, E. 6,
England.

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STRINGER YARN VERY GOOD

It seems like F.F.M. and I have a similar taste. When it has a story, I like it and when I have a story, it prints it. Sorry if I speak of it as though it were human. It's only because at times it seems that way. I guess it's more like a push button machine. We ask for a certain story and presto there it is.

Last time I wrote I asked for a Haggard yarn and I got it. I asked for the recreation of *Astonishing* and got *A. Merritt's Fantasy* (well maybe I had to help in pushing those two buttons).

I wish I had help in pushing a few more buttons:

(1) *A. Merritt* is a good author, maybe not the best, but a good storyteller. Now how about reviving the old *Astonishing*? Ye gads, am I the only one that wants it? Look at the list of gems its past record produced: "The Halfling," "After the Plague," "It Happened Tomorrow," etc. Think how the future issues could look: Bradbury's Martian chronicles, Leigh Brackett stories about the planets, etc.

(2)–Let's see Stringer's "Wolf Woman," and some stories by Kline, Taine, and Williamson.

Can't go on telling you what to do without saying what I think of what you did. Stringer's "The Woman Who Couldn't Die" is a slightly outdated (1928) story, especially the blood transfusion apparatus, but there wasn't one fault in the story. Very good, very similar to Merritt's "People of the Pit." Except the people of Stringer's pit were human. I grade it with a great big double A. I've already suggested printing Stringer's other fantasy "The Wolf Woman." Might as well print them both so the fans can enjoy them and ask:

"Did Stringer write any more fantasies?"

No! No more fantasies, only two.

Anything else? Yes, I need 17 back issues of F.F.M. including the "Darkness and Dawn" trilogy issues, and "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," the first four F.N.s, the second and the third issues of *Astonishing* and many, many more (119 in all).

Thanks for two of the best magazines ever sold.

DON A. MCGINNIS.

4324 St. Johns Ave.,
Dayton 6, Ohio.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Please, would you announce in your magazine the opening of the Galaxy Science Fiction Society? Members under 18. If interested, write Dennis Lynch, 2834 Carlaris Rd., San Marino 9, Calif.

MUST SELL OUT

I'm afraid I've an awful lot of nerve asking you again to publish another letter of mine, especially when I've not gotten the last two issues of your mag, but you see, I went to Denver, Col. (by thumb) to see if I could get work there, and at the same time to improve my health. But I was unsuccessful on both counts. And after hocking my wristwatch and jacket, and receiving a few bucks from some true friends, I returned home (via thumb) and now I've decided to try my dad-blamed darnedest to sell all of my magazines—for from 10c each up to 50c, including postage.

I sure hate to do this, but I've got to get some money—and there are times when one must sacrifice his possessions in order to keep alive.

Scienti-Fantastically yours,

GLEN WRIGHT.

Rm #3–45 Lawn St.,
Rochester 7,
N. Y.

P. S. I'm selling these mags out of necessity—not business. Anyone wanting a complete list of the mags enclose a penny postcard or a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233), of Famous Fantastic Mysteries, published bi-monthly at Kokomo, Indiana, for October 1, 1950. 1. The names and address of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business managers are: Publisher, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Managing editor, None. Business manager, None. 2. The owner is: All Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York; Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York; Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York; Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York; Shirley M. Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Signed, Harold S. Goldsmith, Publisher. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 2nd day of October, 1950. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, State of New York, Qualified in New York County, No. 31-9506600, Certificate filed with: City Register N. Y. County, Commission Expires March 30, 1952. (Seal)—Form 3526—Rev. 2-49.

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STRINGER STORY FINE

"The Woman Who Couldn't Die" was, in my opinion, the most enthralling lead novel you have had since "The Valley of Silent Men" some bonths back. It held one literally and actually captivated by the strange fiery power of its narrative.

Since you're giving us Lovecraft, why not concentrate on his more obscure pieces like "The Horror at Redhook," "Dagon" and "The Strange High-house in the Mist"? Many less fortunate than I, who possess these classics, would be eternally indebted to you for the pleasure of reading them.

I'd like to mention I have the following to swap for *Weird Tales* before '37; half-a-dozen *Uncanny*, 3 issues of *Ghost Stories* (1928), some large *Amazings*, 16 mystery-terror mags from 1935-'36 mostly *Dime* and *Thrilling*, "Slan", "Maza of The Moon", "Ghosts, Ghouls and Gallows", "Books of Charles Fort", "Fox Woman", "Black Wheel" (both New Collectors Gp. edition) and about thirty other clothbound books including 6 by Sax Rohmer. Have an Aug. 1928, and a Feb. 1927 *Weird Tales*, both of which I'd like to trade for 2 other pre-1930 issues. Will send complete descriptions of all books and mags in detailed listing to anyone interested. Included for trade are 24 Munsey F.F.M.'s and F.N.'s.

WINCHELL GRAFF.

300 W. 67th St.,
New York 23, N. Y.

FOREVER OURS

It's been some time since I've been among those present in our letter section in F.F.M. and let me say I have missed being here.

I had been getting my copies at the local drugstore. And then they quit selling our mag. (I don't know why). And right away I feel myself getting out of touch with the world of Fantasy. So, after missing a few issues, I finally sent in my subscription. And found myself back in the swim, with the October issue.

The cover was good. But I feel it could have been a wee bit better. Although it did have that classic touch (yes, I said classic) that I associate with F.F.M.

The stories I rated as follows: "The Weigher of Souls"—excellent; "Nor Moon by Night"—very good; "The Woman Who Couldn't Die"—just fair. The novel didn't hang together too well. But it was good in places. But perhaps it may be no more than my prejudice against yarns in the first person.

At any rate the issue on the whole was up to par. And head and shoulders above any other mag of this type on the market. So don't worry about ever losing this reader. As long as F.F.M. is published, I'll be here on this end—enjoying it.

I have quite a few stf. and like mags for sale or swap.

Would appreciate any and all letters. So drop me a line.

So long until the next issue—

IVAN H. COPAS.

R.F.D. #3,
Peebles, Ohio.

ORCHIDS!

Orchids to your wonderful magazines. They are the best in the field—

Could we please have some more of Rohmer in future issues? Your "Brood of the Witch-Queen" was a belated but happy choice to make. Thanks for making fantasy novel-collecting such a happy task.

A fan—

P. C. STEINBRUNNER.

6252 82nd St.
Elmhurst, L. I.,
New York.

OFFERS HELP

I have been reading F.F.M. and its companion magazine F.N. since their inception and have wholeheartedly recommended them to my friends and acquaintances as the best publications in their field.

Naturally many of your newer readers, having read the many wonderful stories in your current issues, will want to add to their enjoyment and their collections by acquiring the back number magazines containing those classics of fantasy and science-fiction which they may have missed because of their tardy introduction to the genre. In order to assist such newcomers in their search for back issues of their favorite magazines or copies of particular stories in book or magazine form, I would like to put my collection of some 80 books and magazines at the service of all interested readers who send a list of their wants and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for a list of the magazines, books, etc. I have available for barter or purchase.

Thanking you for this opportunity to aid my fellow fans of fantasy and science-fiction, I am

GERALD S. NEWMAN.

1440 S. Pulaski Road,
Chicago 23, Ill.

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LIKES POETRY

In my opinion "The Woman Who Couldn't Die" is a fairly good fantasy, but certainly nothing to rave about. Perhaps that opinion is brought about through a fault of my own rather than through any weakness in the style of writing or plotting of Mr. Stringer, though. Anyway, I just didn't get the connection between Thera and Olga. I take it that one was supposed to be an incarnation of the spirit of the other, or something. The whole thing is very vague and left me with a feeling of extreme dissatisfaction. I will ask a friend about the problem, though. He ought to know. He's read the story three times and crusaded long and arduously for its reprint in F.F.M. I'm sure he can clear up the fantastic mystery (pun) for me.

Speaking of the short stories, I just couldn't force myself to plow through the long-winded style of André Maurois in his story, "Weigher Of Souls." The story was probably good, but it couldn't have been worth the effort I would have spent in trying to find it among those hundreds of superfluous words.

The other short story was a different matter, however. The style was direct and clear cut, the plot was rather unusual and simple, and, best of all, the ending was superb. If it weren't for the length of the later, I'd try to rate it better than "The Woman Who Couldn't Die."

Thanks for the poetry. I want to see a special poetry section too.

With the request that you print a Taine story—any Taine story—I shall leave you. Be back again next issue though.

TOM COVINGTON.

315 Dawson St.,
Wilmington, N. C.

MAUROIS YARN GOOD

For all the build-up it got (and didn't deserve) "The Woman Who Couldn't Die" was a let-down. The handling of the wild, wind-tossed life of the Vikings, the berserker harrying of the coasts around Denmark, Scotland, etc., was poorly reproduced by Arthur Stringer. All seemed so lifeless and dull; even the setting, the very first sentence, and I quote "The fiord air was windless and humid". . . was unlike the typical abode of a dragon ship.

One would expect Karl Knuttson to be as interesting as Sigurd Blödoxe, at least. The latter character was interesting, but Knuttson was reviled all along. What was Stringer trying to do? He seems to have been confused. Even he was not sure of just what Parese resembled. Parese is described as a "gaunt Corsican" early in the story. Later, he is described as short and squat, or words to that effect.

Whole story was pointless. No one profited from the trip; and the far north holds little for a white man. Gold is all that ever lured anyone so far north, and it is not likely to happen again. It does continually offer hardships. But even in story, Stringer denies us the one luxury really worthwhile that the north ever offered Man, and that for an awful price . . . gold!

"The Weigher of Souls" is better. Maurois could have made it shorter and eliminated so many anti-climaxes. But a good yarn, all in all. Lawrence cheated in drawing the ultra-violet lamp. The mercury arc tube is much too dim, the reflector likewise, and the room is practically dark. As I know them, a sun-lamp is very bright. Thus, the "soul substance" would be invisible, unless the disk with the aperture in the center were moved up flush with the lamp to exclude all but the beam of radiation through the aperture. It further seems that after a lot of deliberation and doubt on the part of Dr. James, (as to just what he was doing), questioning if it were soul-substance or anything else, that they took a rather sudden departure from well founded doubt and simply decided that it was "soul-substance." Many of the topics brought into this story were true. The "Odic-force" was not just a product of the imagination of André Maurois. Baron Karl von Reichenbach really existed. Dr. Joseph Jastrow, in his book "Wish and Wisdom" devotes six pages to Reichenbach's ideas (which were a delusion), and to a Frenchman's theory about "N-Rays." I recommend this book to all readers as enjoyable.

"Nor Moon by Night" was fair. Passably fair. I gathered that the executed inmates were actually precipitated into purgatory. For the stay at the point of "materialization" was limited. One day's delay was too late . . . for what? One must move away from the point of entrance to the top of the valley, or miss something better, it seems. Seems unfair. Sort of a punishment for those who ignore the old idea of purgatory in figuring the chances of life after death. You land there but you don't know it.

BOB BARNETT.

1107 Lyon, Carthage, Mo.

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, New York..

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205 EAST 42nd STREET,
NEW YORK 17, NEW YORK

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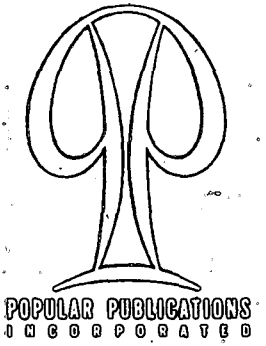

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